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ABSTRACT

The impact of implementation of a quality system on Australia's vocational education and training (VET) classrooms was examined through case study research with more than 100 quality managers, head teachers, and teachers in 8 technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia. The literature on quality was also reviewed. Two-thirds of the teachers believed that implementing quality was having a positive impact on their work but had not yet made an impact on the learning process or the classroom because of the lack of focus on the quality systems being implemented in institutes. Quality meant different things to different people. Quality in VET had been implemented primarily as a way to improve business and the running of institutes rather than as a means of improving learning. The study confirmed the need to continue working to bridge the gap between institute, state, and national VET quality measures and programs and quality measures being gathered and implemented directly by teachers. (Eight tables and 58 references are included. The following items are appended: lists of TAFE institutions and staff consulted; the teacher focus group questions; and tables detailing the quality initiatives identified by teachers consulted and quality initiatives improving and impeding teachers' work.) (MN)

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Jennifer Gibb

NCVER

Editor's note:

At the time of the study for this publication, the Australian Quality Training Framework was the Australian Recognition Framework. The earlier title is maintained in this report for historical accuracy.

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Executive summary

This study aimed to identify what constituted the quality journey in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, how quality was understood and put into practice within technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, and what impact the implementation of quality in the VET sector appeared to be having on the learning environment. The study also drew on the findings and the literature to investigate the quality movement's potential impact on the learning environment.

This report is based on two sources of information:

- qualitative research, in the form of case-study research with quality managers, head teachers and teachers in eight institutes of TAFE in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia
- non-empirical research, in the form of literature relating to quality in education, and current work by USA practitioners renowned for implementing quality in the classroom.

The national strategy for VET (ANTA 1994) highlighted quality and a commitment to ongoing improvement as integral features of training organisations throughout the VET sector, identifying this as a key objective. Subsequent reports expand on quality principles (ANTA 1997c) and assurance (ANTA 1997a), and define quality as it applies to the recognition framework (ANTA 1998b, 1999, 2001a, 2001b).

Since 1994, there has been a great deal of activity related to quality at all levels of the VET sector—national, state and institute. As this study reveals, the activity has not as yet permeated the classroom and learning environments. Applying quality principles to all aspects of commercial, educational and other activities is a relatively new phenomenon. To date, most of the quality activity has concentrated on management and administration of the VET sector and its training organisations.

The first part of this report is an overview of how quality in education has been defined, and a perspective on the approach to quality that has been adopted in the VET sector in Australia over 1995–99.

The second part, based on consultations in 1998 with over 100 TAFE teachers across eight TAFE institutes, resulted in findings related to:

- the central question of how quality is understood by teachers in the VET sector, including the range of quality initiatives known and their impact in the classroom
- changes in the VET sector, and to teachers' work, that have an impact on how teachers perceive quality.

Two-thirds of the teachers surveyed felt that implementing quality was having a positive impact on their work. However, as yet, it had not made an impact on the learning process or the classroom, because this had not been a focus of the quality systems being implemented in institutes. The consultations confirmed the following:

- Quality meant different things to different people.
- 'Quality' in VET had not had a focus on the learning process, except in superficial ways.

- Quality had been implemented as a way to improve business and the running of institutes, not as a means of improving learning.
- Many other VET initiatives were impacting on teachers' work, and teachers were still coming to terms with these.

The non-empirical part of the study assessed recent literature on how implementing quality can impact in the classroom. This component of the study included seminars and a workshop conducted by Myron Tribus and David Langford, American guests of the Australian Quality Council. It revealed that:

- Implementing quality need not apply only to management and administration of training organisations. It is applicable and practicable for the classroom. Thus far, the VET sector has not made the classroom or learning environment a specific focus of the quality system. This is a real gap in the implementation of quality.
- Practitioners like Tribus and Langford, who use the quality approach and tools in the classroom, define quality simply as: 'what makes learning a pleasure and a joy'. Too often, quality is interpreted and acted upon as if it is customer focus or strategic planning or data collection. These are the parts of what constitutes a quality approach, not the whole journey.
- Making learning the core of what happens in the VET sector is essential if the sector is to adopt lifelong learning as one of its goals.
- The quality framework for VET is a powerful tool and has already had an impact on the management and administration of training organisations. The potential of this tool in the classroom is even greater if we start to envision the class itself as the organisation, the teacher as the leader, the students as the people in the system and the product as learning.

In the time since the institute consultations, national quality implementation through staff development has continued, especially via work-based learning programs. However, against that, a recent major survey (Harris et al. 2001) also found evidence of a certain 'corporatisation' in the types of professional development being undertaken by VET teachers.

An essential point from the consultations stands; that is, continuing effort is required to bridge the gap between institute–state–national-level VET quality measures and programs, and quality measures that are understood, gathered and implemented directly by teachers and for learning. Learning, many theorists argue, is best construed as a co-operative and creative process with the responsibility for success shared between the teacher and the students in a classroom 'ecosystem'. That approach is not a salient feature of national quality implementation.

A related point, which came through clearly in the institute consultations, is the management improvement truism, that a broad-ranging quality initiative will have to work hard to succeed if it is introduced at a time of organisational and people stress. The stress on this occasion was that of TAFE institute restructuring or downsizing.

1 Introduction

Rationale for the project

A 1997 review of research into quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) found that most of the research relating to quality in the VET sector was concerned with the business of establishing quality assurance measures and was therefore developmental, rather than evaluative (Hager 1997).

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of a research project, which was designed to contribute to the evaluative research into quality. The project, conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), aimed to examine the impact that quality initiatives were having on the teaching–learning process in VET.

Guest, writing in the Victorian Office of Training and Further Education's (OTFE) *Q magazine* (1997) noted that:

> It was generally recognised in the US that the use of quality principles should not be confined to the administration/management area, but should be integrated into the core business of teaching and learning.

Writing for a similar journal in the same year, Kable (1997) echoed this view:

> To gain maximum value from an imposed quality system, it must be structured around the processes that drive the business.

If we apply these statements to training organisations, it is implicit that the quality system should be embedded within the learning and teaching process. Thus, for training organisations that have been on their quality journey for some years, we would expect to see the quality initiatives having some effect on the learning experience. The emphasis on learning throughout this report is deliberate since the main activity that takes place in a VET classroom is learning and not teaching.

Teaching is a resource, and a very important resource, which supports learning. The term 'delivery' has not been used, since it does not connote the idea of teachers and learners working together, both being responsible and accountable for learning, which is at the heart of a learning-centred approach to education and training.

> ... teaching and imparting knowledge make sense in an unchanging environment which is why it has been an unquestioned function for centuries. But if there is one truth about modern man, it is that he lives in an environment which is continually changing and, therefore, the aim of education, must be the facilitation of learning.
>
> (Rogers, quoted in Knowles, Holton & Swanson 1998, p.84)

Many VET practitioners believe it is premature to be examining and seeking to measure the effects which the development and implementation of quality systems are having on the quality of the teaching–learning experience. They hold this view because the primary effort at the start of a quality journey is generally directed towards the application of quality principles to the management of the organisation. This has been, and continues to be, the primary focus of the quality framework for VET developed in each state and territory. Furthermore, 'quality' as a term is problematic because it means different things to different people.

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In order to answer the main research question—*What impact is implementing a quality system having on the VET classroom?*—the following questions had to be researched and documented:

- What form has the quality journey in the VET sector taken so far?
- How is the term 'quality' understood in the VET sector?
- What impact do teachers in the VET sector believe quality is having on teaching and learning?
- What other factors and agendas influence how quality is being implemented in the sector?
- What does the literature and the work of quality practitioners and educators tell us about the impact quality can have in the classroom?

Structure of the report

In answering the research question this report is structured as follows:

- methodology used, and definitions of quality
- the quality journey in the VET sector so far in Australia
- teachers' views on the impact of implementing a quality system on teaching
- issues affecting perceptions of quality
- how the quality philosophy and quality initiatives can be used to create a learner for life—and, thus, how quality can play an integral role in improving the learning experience offered to students
- discussion and conclusion
- appendices, including case-study information, focus group questions and participants.

2 Methodology

The report is based on two sources of information:

- qualitative research in the form of case-study research with quality managers, head teachers and teachers in eight institutes of TAFE in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia
- non-empirical research in the form of literature published in the field of quality in education, as well as current work by practitioners who have established reputations in the USA for their work in implementing quality principles in the classroom

The study was a preliminary one which aimed to identify what constituted the quality journey in the VET sector, how quality was understood and put into practice within TAFE institutes and what impact the implementation of quality in the VET sector appeared to be having on the learning environment. The study also drew on the findings and the literature investigating the potential impact of the quality movement on the learning environment.

Selection of survey sites

Since 1996, all TAFE institutes have been required to have a quality system. For most training providers this has meant gaining ISO 9000 accreditation, and adopting a self-assessment system as required by the quality system framework for VET developed by each state and territory training authority.

The eight TAFE institutes which participated in the study had all been recognised publicly for their commitment to quality and for the progress they had made on the quality journey (see appendix A). These organisations had been recognised for excellence through the Australian Training Awards (administered by the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA]) and the Australian Quality Awards (administered by the Australian Quality Council [AQC]).

The rationale for selection of these organisations was that, since they had gained an award for their commitment to quality, they would have been on their quality journey for some time and it could be expected that the impact of quality was filtering through to the learning environment.

This seemed a fair way of selecting sites for the case studies—rather than random selection from the pool of institutes, all at different stages in their quality journeys. The aim of the project was not to evaluate these institutions, or to compare them with other training organisations implementing quality processes, but to gain an insight into whether quality was having an impact in the classroom.

Non-reliance on quantitative measures

The preliminary research for this national project was conducted early in 1998. Given that this research topic was considered by some to be premature, in that the VET sector had been in a state of flux and change since the early 1990s, and given that implementing quality was a relatively new concept within the sector, there was hesitation about using the available quantitative measures

assessing the impact of implementing quality on the quality of the teaching and learning experience.

Quantitative measures such as participation rates, module completions, employment of graduates, satisfaction of graduates, and numbers of graduates returning to undertake further study, all provide an indication of the performance of the VET sector, but these types of data do not necessarily enable conclusions about the quality of the teaching–learning process at the institute level.

Moreover, the VET sector has been through significant changes in recent times: the move to a competency-based approach; flexible delivery; development of a client-oriented culture, restructuring and amalgamation of colleges; redefinition of the mix of full-time to part-time staff; and changes to the function of the teacher–trainer.

While some of these changes may be perceived as part of the implementation of a quality system, many are educational and system changes. It is difficult to attribute improvements in, for example, module completion rates or employment outcomes, to the implementation of quality measures (alone).

Also, the actual quantitative measures are problematic. Module completion rates, for example, are calculated from highly aggregated data. The module completion rate masks factors such as varying state and territory interpretations of the module outcomes specified in the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS), the variable length of modules, and the variable content and coverage of courses. Thus, to compare the module completion rates of institutes taking part in the study with, say, the state level module completion rate, could prove misleading.

The use of data from the student outcome surveys would also be problematic for this study. In order to compare data from individual institutes with the state-level data, factors (such as the response rate, the types of courses respondents commonly undertook, the qualification levels of respondents) have to be considered. Furthermore, there are protocols and sensitivities about using institute-level data in national studies.

Another option was the comparison of data over time within the one institute. This approach, however, was also considered unsatisfactory given the changes in the VET colleges and VET system, especially the restructures and mergers of colleges into larger training organisations during the 1990s and the shift to the post-1998 recognition framework, which introduced new concepts for recognition of training organisations and training packages. For any one institute, it would be difficult to get a meaningful and reliable time series of participation (say, module completions) and outcome (say, graduate destinations, or since 1999, student outcomes) data over very recent years.

There is a final point to note, when considering the adequacy of quantitative data to assess the impact of implementing a quality system on learning. In the main, the data available are used to assess the accountability of the system—whether students are completing the studies they undertake, whether students are getting jobs, how quickly it takes students to get into employment, the return on the public training dollar, and so on.

Generally speaking, these measures say little about student learning and whether it has improved, notions at the core of the concept of 'quality of learning'. A partial exception is the student outcomes survey (NCVER 1999, 2000, 2001). From 1999, this has begun to build a time series of data on students' satisfaction with various aspects of VET training, including teaching and instruction.

Harvey (1998) makes the observation that governments around the world are looking for higher education to become more responsive by:

- becoming more relevant to the social and economic needs of the community
- widening access to university study
- ensuring comparability of processes and procedures within and between institutions, including international comparisons.

Harvey argues that quality has been used as a tool to ensure some compliance with these issues. Thus, approaches to quality are predominantly concerned with establishing quality monitoring procedures. A similar observation could be made about the VET sector.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA 1998a), in its national strategy for vocational education and training to 2003, has developed the following mission statement for VET:

> To ensure that the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry and to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential.

The five objectives that underpin this mission statement are:

- equipping Australians for the world of work
- enhancing mobility in the labour market
- achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training
- increasing investment in training
- maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure.

Performance indicators have been developed to provide data on the extent to which the VET system is achieving these goals. These indicators include participation rates, module completion rates, graduate employment rates and graduate and employer satisfaction rates. ANTA has placed a significant emphasis on the National Training Framework as its main mechanism for assuring quality in the VET sector.

Harvey (1998, p.237) makes the point that:

> The accountability focus, despite its onerous and oppressive burden, is a safe process for higher education because it does not consider the nature of learning or what is learned. By focusing on accountability, the transformative potential of quality monitoring is not fulfilled.

Once again, while this statement refers to higher education, it can be applied to the VET sector. The accountability focus begs the question, which should be included in any comprehensive study on the impact of quality in VET. That is: *How is the term 'quality' understood by the teachers in the sector and is the definition or purpose of quality as they see it compatible with the one that the system is establishing?*

Qualitative research approach

The research conducted for this study primarily involved consultations (which included questionnaires and focus group discussions, as per appendix C) with quality managers and teachers in the TAFE institutes, and assessment of the views of practitioners implementing quality in the classroom.

Given that the insights gained from this approach were based on focus group discussions, this report is a preliminary 'scoping' report which seeks to set out all the various factors and influences that impact on the research question: *what impact is implementing quality having on the quality of learning in the VET sector?*

Consultations

The approach adopted was, in the first instance, to consult teachers directly to determine from them what impact they felt implementing quality was having in the classroom. This was achieved by selecting a range of training organisations to visit, sending out a short preliminary questionnaire and then arranging to meet with groups of 8–10 teachers to discuss their experiences of implementing a quality system. A total of 117 staff from eight TAFE institutes (see appendix B for details) took part in these consultations.

The process of inviting teachers to participate in the project was as follows:

- The NCVER project officer wrote to the director of each institute inviting participation.
- The director nominated the institute quality manager to be the contact person for the project.
- The NCVER project officer asked the quality manager to invite 20 teaching and support staff from a range of programs to participate in a focus group discussion. Where possible, two focus groups, each comprising 8–10 people, were conducted in each institute.
- Staff who volunteered, or who were nominated to participate, were then sent a questionnaire (appendix C-1) to complete before the focus group meeting.

The purpose of the questionnaire was twofold:

- to find out about the learning environment in which respondents taught
- to find out what quality initiatives had been implemented and what effect these were having on the work that teachers and support staff do.

Appendix B lists the project advisory group comprised of staff from NCVER, the Australian Quality Council and institutes of TAFE, and the names of all those teachers who contributed to the study.

The 117 teachers participating in the consultations taught a range of courses covering diploma level, associate diploma level, and certificate I–IV as well as general access and equity courses. The teachers represented the full range of fields of study and included trade and non-trade teachers from general trades areas, community health, business, manufacturing, information technology, foundation education, communication skills, animal care, electrical engineering, horticulture, aged care, workplace training and assessment, arts, health and safety and childcare.

Of the 117 participants, 100 taught classes of 11–20 people or more—only seven taught smaller classes. One hundred and four (89%) of the teachers consulted used mainly classroom-based, teacher-directed methods with some self-paced delivery. Fifteen teachers indicated that they also used workplace-based delivery strategies. The predominance of classroom-based delivery is reflected in the national VET statistical collection: 1997 data reveal that 86% of modules were delivered using classroom-based, teacher-directed and self-paced delivery strategies (unpublished statistics, NCVER).

The NCVER project officer spent about two hours with each group of teachers discussing the impact of the introduction of quality to the classroom. The questionnaire and focus groups convened to gather information for this project were seen as one way to begin identifying which quality initiatives were having an impact in the classroom. The questionnaire and the focus group questions are in appendix C.

The teachers who chose to participate in the consultations did so for a variety of reasons, because they:

- had something they wanted to say about the quality journey, or
- were involved in the quality journey in some way, or
- were told to participate, or
- felt quality had exerted no impact on teaching and wanted to say so!

Thus, as well as representing a broad cross-section of courses, the teachers who participated also represented a range of agendas.

The hypothesis adopted in this project was that quality principles are applicable to the classroom-learning environment. As stated earlier in the report, core business in the VET sector is teaching and learning, and the quality system should be relevant and structured around its core process—learning. At the time of the consultations, and at the stage in the quality journey then applying, it was estimated that evidence of quality principles and processes could be reported at least in three areas of activity:

- the way in which teachers monitor their own performance
- the way in which teachers gather feedback from students and make improvements to their courses and lessons
- the staff development opportunities available to teachers.

The aim of this report is to comment on the overall VET sector—on the system itself rather than on individual institutes. Therefore, the discussions held with teachers were to gain insights into the extent to which teachers felt quality was impacting on the learning environment.

The results of both the preliminary questionnaire and focus group discussions were collated into individual case studies for each institute and returned to the teachers for comment.

Insights from the literature

The final component of the research was the non-empirical angle—examining the literature to determine what other researchers are saying about quality and its impact in the classroom. This phase included attendance at conferences and workshops presented by educators such as Myron Tribus and David Langford, American practitioners who implement quality principles in the classroom and share their ideas with other teachers.

The literature reviewed for this project served two purposes:

- It provides background to demonstrate how quality is understood in education, this background informing the way the research was conducted. This is summarised in the fourth chapter of this report, 'Quality in education'.
- It gives direction to the next stage of the quality journey in the VET sector: how to use insights from the quality movement to improve the learning. This is summarised in the chapter, 'How the quality framework can help in the classroom'.

Extra dimensions in the qualitative approach

This preliminary scoping study used a qualitative methodology, which involved open-ended questions and group discussions.

'Quality' is a term that means different things to different people. It is being implemented throughout the VET sector in a variety of ways at national, state and institute level, not to mention at the classroom level. Reviewing Tony Townsend, Begley (1998) picks up his point that quality cannot be discussed without discussing values and also the context in which quality is being implemented. There is no clear answer to the question of what impact the implementation of quality is having on learning in the VET sector. This emerged clearly during the research.

In every focus group, participants discussed their understanding and interpretation of the term 'quality', how they felt management interpreted the term, the values underpinning the different perceptions of quality, the environment in which they were working, the changing role of the TAFE instructor, and the changes in the VET sector. Thus, context and values were important

aspects of the discussion of how quality was being implemented. These issues are summarised later in the report.

In order to examine the findings of the research, the approach used by Connor (1997) has been adopted in this paper and encompasses the following steps:

- look back and report on how the term 'quality' is understood (from the literature) and what form the quality journey has been taking in the VET sector at national, state and institute level (chapters 3 and 4)
- look inwards and present what impact quality has had so far and what issues cloud the picture (chapters 5 and 6)
- look forward to discuss the implications for the VET sector of recent literature and practice in USA on quality, and its potential impact on the classroom (chapters 7 and 8).

3 The quality journey within the VET sector

Introduction

The 1994 national strategy for VET (ANTA 1994) identified quality and a commitment to ongoing improvement as integral features of training organisations throughout the VET sector.

> Quality in all aspects of vocational education and training is a key objective of the National Strategy. Vocational education and training will focus on best practice and quality assurance. Staff development and management improvement will be priorities ... (ANTA 1994, p.11)

Since that time there has been a great deal of activity related to quality at all levels of the vocational education and training sector at the national, state and institute level, but not as yet in the classroom–learning environment. Applying quality principles to training organisations is a relatively new phenomenon. Much of the quality activity has concentrated on management and administration of the VET sector and of training organisations.

This chapter is an overview of the approach to quality that has been adopted in the VET sector in Australia throughout the period 1995–99, with updates to 2002.

This section of the report provides:

- definitions of the term 'quality' and 'quality systems' as used by the Australian National Training Authority
- the approach to quality adopted by the Australian Quality Council, since this approach underpins the state/territory frameworks or systems for quality in VET
- a summary of the various initiatives at national, state and institute level within the VET sector which have all been adopted under the banner of 'quality'
- key national documents and sources related to quality, as per the Australian Quality Council Business Excellence Framework, and to benchmarking.

The ANTA approach to quality

Definitions of quality

The terms 'quality', 'quality management', and 'quality assurance (endorsement)', are defined in the Australian Recognition Framework (ANTA 1998b, and similarly in ANTA 1999), which is now the Australian Quality Training Framework (ANTA 2001a, 2001b).

- *Quality*: the level of satisfaction with and effectiveness of vocational education and training organisations, their products and services, established through conformity with the requirements set by clients and stakeholders
- *Total quality management*: the activities that determine policy objectives and responsibilities, implemented by means such as quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement within a quality system

- *Quality assurance*: the planned and systematic process of ensuring the consistent application of registration requirements by registered training organisations. Quality assurance forms part of a quality management system/focus
- *Quality endorsement*: the recognition awarded by a state training authority/state recognition authority to a registered training organisation, to receive delegated powers of self-management for the scope of their registration and self-management of accreditation of their own courses and customised qualifications, in accordance with the parameters set by the Australian Recognition Framework

Principles of quality for VET

The principles for quality in VET were published by ANTA (1997) and feature in many of the state/territory frameworks for quality in VET. They are:

1. Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of a primary focus on clients and potential clients of the vocational education and training sector.
2. Quality arrangements should promote a focus on core business—development and delivery of vocational education and training products and services to individual learners and enterprises.
3. Quality arrangements should promote continuous improvement of the quality of vocational education and training products, services and associated process.
4. Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of ongoing staff participation and ownership.
5. Quality arrangements should encourage informed decision-making based on the measurement, analysis and appropriate use of data.
6. Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of leadership in the successful development and implementation of a quality approach.
7. Quality arrangements should be comprehensive and balanced, encompassing key quality management elements such as quality assurance, quality improvements and best practice.
8. Quality arrangements should add value to vocational education and training products and services.

(pp.3-9)

Quality arrangements

In the VET sector, the national approach to quality is guided in the main by the National Training Framework, which comprises the Australian Recognition Framework and training packages. These arrangements are described in full in the ANTA publication *Assuring quality and choice in national training* (ANTA 1997a).

The Australian Recognition Framework describes the principles and national standards that are to be met by registered training organisations as well as protocols for external review processes, marketing of recognised training and fees for registration. The Australian Recognition Framework arrangements promote the development of training, which is quality-assured and client-focussed.

Training packages are the basis for vocational training in a growing number of industries throughout Australia and comprise competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications. Training packages may also include guidance for trainers and assessors in the form of learning strategies, assessment resources and professional development materials.

The major quality initiatives focus primarily on the process of registration of training providers and the specifications underpinning the training programs. The approach to quality is generally conformance-driven, with the core business being described as 'delivery of training product and service' rather than learning. The 'transformative' quality of vocational education and training is not really captured by these definitions or processes.

A learning, rather than conformance-driven, approach to quality is more in evidence in ANTA staff development programs, particularly *Reframing the future*. Also, ANTA's annual national priorities for 2001 and 2002 include 'individuals as learners'.

AQC and benchmarking approaches to quality

The Australian Quality Council does not give definitions of 'quality', 'quality management', 'quality systems' or 'quality assurance'. Instead, it has stated that quality management is 'People achieving and sustaining superior organisation performance within a customer driven, quality based culture of continual improvement'. These key ideas underpin this definition:

- Quality management is about people working at all levels in the organisation and in all roles of the organisation. It is about people who are customers, suppliers and other stakeholders for the organisation.
- Quality management is about achieving superior organisational performance.
- Quality management requires a clear focus on the customer. It is the customer who defines the quality of the goods or services they are receiving.
- Quality management is about the culture of the organisation. It is about how things are done in an organisation, how dilemmas are resolved and it is about the overall style of the organisation.
- Quality management is about ongoing, relentless and continual improvement in all key elements of the enterprise.
- Quality management is about sustaining superior organisational performance into the future.
- Quality management is a carefully planned and managed process of transformation over time.

AQC principles of contemporary quality

The Australian Quality Council identifies nine principles of contemporary quality and these are:

1. Quality is defined by the client.
2. To improve the outcome, improve the process.
3. People work in a system. The role of the leader is to work on the system, to improve it continuously with his or her help.
4. All systems and processes exhibit variability (therefore we should not react to variation as if it were something abnormal).
5. Continuous improvement relies on continual learning.
6. The most important resource is people—their creativity and knowledge.
7. Decisions and actions must be based on facts and data.
8. Leadership provides direction and creates a supportive environment.
9. Improvement must be plan driven, not event driven.

AQC Business Excellence Framework

The quality framework, which the Australian Quality Council now calls the business excellence framework (Australian Quality Council 1998, 2002), is intended to cover the complete management system of an enterprise. The framework comprises seven categories as follows:

1. Leadership
2. Strategy, policy and planning
3. Information and analysis

4. People

5. Customer focus

6. Processes, products and services

7. Organisational performance

The drivers of the framework are the leadership and customer focus categories. The categories that enable continuous improvement of the process, product or service are strategy, policy and planning; information and analysis; and people.

The processes, products and services category emphasises how work is done in order to achieve the required results and obtain improvement, while the organisational performance category encompasses the results that the organisation achieves.

This framework is designed to assess current performance levels and develop a road map for future improvement. The framework provides a useful tool to take stock of the organisation's current position and to involve its people in achieving its desired future position.

The seven categories for excellence, which are further broken down into items, form a basis from which people in the organisation can ask questions and gain a deeper understanding of their management system. The framework promotes a systems approach by exploring how the organisation works to achieve its goals and leaves the specifics of what is done to address each area of management to the people within (Australian Quality Council 1998).

Those who use the framework are encouraged to assess how the organisation performs in relation to each of the seven categories. This assessment involves identifying four stages:

- approach: that is, the organisation's intent—the plans, strategies, processes and infrastructure in place
- deployment: what activities are actually occurring
- results: what measures are used to demonstrate that what was planned is actually being achieved
- improvement: what processes are in place to monitor and review the approach, its deployment and the results or outcomes being achieved

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a pervasive management improvement technique in the Australian Public Service and Commonwealth Government and State governments (Council of Australian Governments [COAG]) contexts. It features (see the final section of this chapter) in the ANTA *Annual national report* and the corresponding VET section of the annual COAG report on government services issued by the Productivity Commission (2002).

Two definitions of benchmarking follow:

> Benchmarking is where you systematically measure and compare the products, services and processes of your organisation—internally and against other relevant organisations—and take the best practices into your organisation.
>
> (Management Advisory Board & Management Improvement Advisory Committee 1996, p.10)

> Benchmarking is another term that is used widely when discussions of quality take place. It is a tool for finding, adapting and implementing outstanding practices in order to achieve superior performance. (Australian Quality Council 1999)

Benchmarking, a vital management tool for continuous improvement, is undertaken over a period of time in order to sustain performance and involves identifying:

- how well the organisation is performing (this means that data on current performance must be collected)

- how good it needs to be
- how to get to that point
- links with the mission, vision and values statement of the organisation.

An organisation needs to choose partners with whom to benchmark. An organisation can benchmark 'internally', that is, inside the organisation, for example, across sites, and this helps an organisation to a better understanding of its own operations. If an organisation chooses to benchmark 'externally', it can benchmark against competitors, or other organisations within the industry, or it can do 'generic' or process benchmarking with unlike firms outside its own industry.

It is commonly agreed that there are two basic types of benchmarking:

- numerical (or results) benchmarking, a description of performance and priority areas for improvement, but which does not identify reasons or explanations of how to improve
- process benchmarking, which compares processes inside an organisation with similar processes elsewhere in the same or other organisations, and allows the organisation to measure the effectiveness of improvements that have been put in place.

Typical results and processes in the VET sector that may be benchmarked include national skill outcomes, employer and student outcomes, access and participation, unit costs and asset use (at the system or state level), or customer feedback, course design, assessment practices and delivery mechanisms (at the state or more often the institute level).

The quality journey in the VET sector so far

The first factor to note, when describing quality and quality arrangements in the VET sector, is the fundamental changes that have taken place in the sector since a national competency-based training system was first endorsed in 1990. All of these changes have the potential to impact on the quality of the teaching and learning experience.

These changes include restructures and mergers of TAFE institutes, the changing work of TAFE teachers, the mix of full-time to part-time staff, the range of clients whose needs the VET teacher–trainer has to satisfy, and fundamental rethinking of the approach to education and training. The last includes the moves to a competency-based system, to an evidence-based approach to assessment, to flexible learning (which incorporates self-paced and online learning), to the development of training packages, and to the provision of training in the workplace, not forgetting the advent of 'user choice' and new apprenticeships in 1998.

The VET sector was directed by ANTA to establish a quality system by 1996. Thus, during the last five years or so, a number of initiatives have been established and these constitute the quality journey of the sector so far:

- As indicated earlier, ANTA has developed the Australian Recognition Framework which sets out the guidelines for registration and quality endorsement of training organisations. It has directed the development of training packages in a range of industries. These training packages set out the competency standards for the industry, assessment guidelines and a qualifications framework.
- Related quality initiatives include the publication of a national strategy for VET (ANTA 1998a), the development of key performance measures and major statistical collections for the VET sector: the national VET statistics collection, the national contracts of training statistical collection, the national employer satisfaction survey and the national graduate destination and satisfaction surveys, now replaced by the student outcomes survey.
- National staff and professional development initiatives include *Framing the future, LearnScope, Management enhancement team approach* and *Action learning. Framing the future,* the ANTA

program promoting structured, 'work-based learning' among VET staff, has had over 25 000 participants in over 770 work-based project groups since 1997 (Mitchell, Henry & Young 2001, p.5). It has now been restyled as *Reframing the future*, with a national office in South Australia. *LearnScope* funds other work-based learning projects to help teachers and trainers develop skills in applying educational technology to learning.

- At the state level, each state and territory has developed its own quality framework for VET for institute use for self-assessment purposes and quality endorsement. These quality frameworks are based on the Australian Recognition Framework and the set of principles developed by ANTA in 1997. Most institutes have also chosen to reflect the Australian Quality Council Business Excellence Framework, which provides a model for organisations to use in the assessment of their performance and identification of areas needing improvement. At the state level, there has also been activity related to strategic plans, benchmarking projects, best practice projects, surveys of graduates and employers and development of performance indicators.
- At the level of the training organisation, the quality journey may take many forms. The most common include: ISO 9000 certification, either for the whole organisation or teaching units/ sections within; self-assessing against the state's quality framework with a view to gaining quality-endorsed training organisation status; seeking quality-endorsed training organisation status; conducting surveys of graduates, students, employers and staff; and developing documentation to support processes which contribute to the efficient running of the organisation. Some institutes have also undertaken the *Investors in people* program.
- For the teacher in the classroom, national projects on the teaching and learning process include the manual *Good, better, best* (ANTA 1997b), a tool for teachers which enables them to reflect on their current practice, and *Success in practice: A guide for vocational teachers and trainers* (Office of Training and Further Education 1996). However, the quality systems and the range of initiatives thus far developed under the banner 'quality' have not emphasised the process of teaching and learning which, after all, is the core business of the VET sector.

Summary of the quality initiatives at three levels

Table 1 summarises the approaches to quality being adopted at national, state and institute level. The information in this table is organised around the Australian Business Excellence Framework. This framework is the basis of a number of individual state and territory quality frameworks for VET, and is a useful tool for summarising the range of quality initiatives each level of the training sector has adopted.

Over the period 1996–99, workshops and seminars were run by ANTA, through state and territory training authorities, and at the institute level, to promote wider knowledge and understanding of concepts such as quality, best practice and benchmarking.

National and state magazines and newsletters have spread news about quality initiatives and have been a valuable means of sharing information about how different states and training organisations have chosen to implement quality principles. These include:

- *Australian Training*, a free quarterly magazine produced by ANTA
- NCVER's *Australian Training Review* and, more recently, *Insight*, periodicals
- *National Best Practice*, a NSW TAFE quarterly over 1995–98
- *Q Magazine*, a Victorian Office of Training and Further Education quarterly in 1997–98

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Table 1: VET quality initiatives at national, state/territory and institute level, from 1996

Quality (business excellence) criteria	At the national level	At the state/ territory level	At the TAFE institute level
Leadership (leadership through the organisation and in the community)	Development of policy initiatives such as user choice, New Apprenticeships, flexible delivery, VET-in-schools Demonstrating best practice in VET projects Training Provider of the Year' award Focus on lifelong learning, as a product of the ANTA marketing strategy	State/territory training awards Other state/territory quality awards	Some institutes are providing their managers with leadership training Many institutes are developing partnerships with industry Many institutes have quality improvement teams, improving specific areas identified through surveys and consultations
Strategic planning/policy	*A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for VET* *ANTA's Directions and resource allocations*, includes annual national priorities, for VET	Strategic plans for VET Required (for ANTA), an annual VET plan, in each state and territory	Institute strategic plans and business plans
Information and analysis (scope and collection of data as well as analysis and use of data)	National VET statistics collection National contracts of training statistical collection National VET financial information	All states and territories gather VET statistics in accordance with AVETMISS and analyse their data	Each institute gathers and analyses data, either through a central administration section or in individual business units
Customer focus (knowledge of customer needs and expectations, managing customer relations, customer satisfaction)	National graduate destination and satisfaction surveys (1995 to 1998) National student outcomes survey (from 1999) National survey of employer views on VET (from 1995, biennally)	Each state and territory receives a report for their state based on the national surveys of student outcomes and employer views In addition, some states or territories conduct their own surveys	Institutes receive (unpublished) data from the student outcomes survey Institutes conduct student surveys, at enrolment, during or at end of the course Some institutes conduct staff surveys
People (human resources planning, performance management, employee involvement, education and training, communication, wellbeing and satisfaction)	ANTA staff development initiatives such as: *Framing the future* *LearnScope* *Management enhancement team approach* *Reframing the future* (from 2001, national project office in SA) NB: Annual national priorities for 2001–02 include 'individuals as learners'.	Most states and territories have professional development programs and priorities, and have been involved with the *Framing the future* initiative and its successor, *Reframing the future*	Institutes tend to have professional development programs in place and a staff development unit Over 1997–99, professional development has concentrated on workplace assessor training, computer-internet training, awareness-raising sessions, and training in quality assurance and auditing

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Table 1: VET quality initiatives at national, state/territory and institute level, from 1996 (cont.)

Quality (business excellence) criteria	At the national level	At the state/ territory level	At the TAFE institute level
Quality of processes, products and services (design and innovation, supplier relationships, management and improvement of processes)	The Australian Recognition Framework sets out requirements for mutual recognition and registration Training packages: guidelines for developers, support materials, quality assurance kit for support materials Design and ongoing review of national statistical standards for providers and apprenticeships—AVETMISS	Every state and territory has developed a quality framework for VET, which TAFE institutes use as a self-assessment tool and for quality endorsed training organisation status States and territories develop processes to validate quality endorsed training organisation status States and territories also develop their own recognition policies	Each institute is using the quality framework as a tool against which to self-assess its operations Each institute has its own processes for course design and review, delivery, skill recognition and reporting student results Some institutes use ISO 9000 as the basis for their processes
Organisational performance (measures of success)	A set of seven key performance indicators for VET has been developed The ANTA annual national report is against these measures; VET part of the Commonwealth–state (COAG) report on government services is similar	The states and territories have developed a set of performance measures and report against these in their annual VET reports	The institutes develop performance measures for each key area in their strategic plans

Sources: See following subsection for the source documents

National documents on quality

This is a select list of ANTA and NCVER policy documents, statistical publications and other sources related to the national VET quality initiatives, arranged once again according to the Australian Quality Council Business Excellence Framework.

Note that, unless referred to elsewhere in the body of this report, publications that are listed here are not usually cited again in the references.

Strategic planning and policy

- ANTA 1998, *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training*, Brisbane
- ANTA 1999, *Directions and resource allocations for 2000*, Brisbane, corresponding publication in 2000

Data-gathering

- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1998: In detail*, Adelaide, corresponding publications in 2000, 2001
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1998: An overview*, Adelaide, corresponding publications in 2000, 2001
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1998: Financial data*, Adelaide, corresponding publications in 2000, 2001
- NCVER 2000, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Annual 1999—at a glance*, Adelaide, corresponding publication in 2001

- NCVER 1999, *Australian apprentice and trainee statistics: Trends 1995 to 1998—an overview*, Adelaide
- NCVER 1998–2002: Various statistical documents relating to specific groups of students such as Indigenous, young people, women, students with disabilities, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, students in rural and remote Australia, overseas students, and students undertaking personal enrichment education and training programs

Customers

- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: Student outcomes survey—national report*, corresponding national publications in 2000, 2001, Adelaide, corresponding state and territory publications in 1999 (previously, from 1995 to 1998, the *TAFE graduate destination survey*)
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: Student outcomes survey—in summary*, Adelaide, corresponding national publications in 2000, 2001, *corresponding state and territory publications in 1999, 2000 and 2001*
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: TAFE and university graduates—at a glance*, Adelaide, corresponding publication in 2000
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: Survey of employer views on vocational education and training—national report*, Adelaide, corresponding publication in 2001 (previously, in 1995 and 1997, *Employer satisfaction with vocational education and training*)
- NCVER 1999, *Australian vocational education and training statistics 1999: Survey of employer views on vocational education and training—at a glance*, Adelaide, corresponding publication in 2001

People

- ANTA 1995, *Management enhancement team approach for VET organisations*, Brisbane
- K Knapsey 1999, *Framing the future: People, places, projects*, ANTA, Brisbane
- K Knapsey 2000, *Framing the future: More people, places and projects*, ANTA, Brisbane
- J Mitchell, J Henry & S Young 2001, *A new model of workbased learning in the VET sector*, ANTA, Melbourne
- ANTA 2002, *LearnScope*, national work-based learning in educational technology, at http://www.learnscope.anta.gov.au [accessed: August 2001]
- ANTA 2002, *Overview of Australian flexible learning framework for VET 2000–2004*, Brisbane
- ANTA 2002, *Reframing the future*, a national staff development project, at http://reframingthefuture.net [accessed: August 2001] (other RTF publications also accessible via this website)

Process

- ANTA 1999, *Australian recognition framework arrangements*, Brisbane
- ANTA 2001, *Australian quality training framework*, Brisbane
- ANTA 1997, *Guidelines for training package developers*, Brisbane
- ANTA 1998, *Updated guidelines for training package developers*, Brisbane
- NCVER 1998, *AVETMISS: The guidelines for VET providers*, Adelaide
- NCVER 1998, *AVETMISS: The standard for VET providers*, Adelaide

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- NCVER 2001, *AVETMISS: The standard for VET financial data (release 1.3)*, Adelaide
- NCVER 2002, *AVETMISS: The standard for VET providers (release 4.0)*, Adelaide
- NCVER 2002, *AVETMISS: The standard for New Apprenticeships (release 4.0)*, Adelaide

Organisational performance

- R B Cullen 1997, *Workskills and national competitiveness: External benchmarks*, ANTA, Brisbane, corresponding internal benchmarks publication in 1998
- ANTA 1999, *Key performance measures for vocational education and training*, Brisbane
- ANTA 2000, *Annual national report 1999: Volume 3—Vocational education and training performance*, Brisbane, corresponding publication in 2001

4 Quality in education

The literature on quality is vast. For this study, the literature that was reviewed related to:

- how quality in education is defined
- factors that influence the quality of education.

Defining quality in education

The word 'quality' used in an educational context has become a shorthand term used to describe a number of features or attributes—a philosophy or way of thinking, an approach to management and an approach to learning. What is of interest to this study is which of these definitions reflects the views of teachers in the VET sector and whether their views are reflected in the way that quality is being implemented in the TAFE institutes.

Heywood (1998) suggests that:

> What in fact is offered by a 'quality' approach is a coherent framework for thinking about the management and improvement of organisations—a systems view of the organisation. (p.10)

Hager (1997) states:

> There is no one universally applicable answer to the question 'what is quality?' since quality is a function of many factors which vary with the nature of the organisation, its particular purposes, its overall philosophy, the nature of its clients, ... (p.6)

Connor (1998) comments on a paper with over 200 definitions of the term. A few that he chooses to quote include:

- A disciplined way of identifying and solving problems in order to improve performance. (Deming 1982)
- Conformance to requirements: discover what the customer wants, train everyone how to accomplish it, and then deliver that to the customer on time. (Crosby 1992)
- Meeting your customer's requirements 100% of the time. (Houghton 1994)
- An attempt to rediscover the customer. Decisions at every level are driven by the customer's needs and desires and quality is defined as 'what the customer wants'. (Noel 1995)
- Quality is when your customers come back and your products don't. (Naumann & Shannon 1992)
- The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. (ISO 8402)

Freed, Klugman and Fife (1997) also quote a number of definitions for quality including:

- ... fitness for use, as judged by the user (Juran 1989)
- ... a thought revolution in management (Ishikawa 1985)
- ... quality is something people do (a verb) rather than a state of being (a noun) (Chaffee & Sherr 1992)
- ... full customer satisfaction (Fiegenbaum 1956)

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Gallagher and Smith (1997) assert that the five most recognised authorities of total quality management are Crosby, Deming, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa and Juran. They have analysed the writings of these five to identify commonalities, which relate to adult learning, transformative learning and critical reflection. These common principles, or 'pillars of quality' are customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, speaking with facts and respect for people. They believe these four pillars are relevant to the operation of classroom training.

ANTA (1999) defines quality as:

> The level of satisfaction with and effectiveness of vocational education and training organisations, their products and services, established through conformity with the requirements set by clients and stakeholders.

Lakomski, editor of the *Australian Journal of Education*, makes the following point when introducing the notion of quality:

> To use a well-worn, but eminently serviceable cliche, quality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Depending on the social, political, economic or educational context in which discussion on quality is conducted, it will look different, mean different things and will lead to different practical proposals of how to bring it about or to maintain it. (Lakomski 1998, p.233)

Baker (1997) makes the point that individual stakeholders in education will define quality in their own way. These stakeholders include the funders (the Commonwealth Government, state and territory governments), the purchasers (students and employers), the providers (training organisations) and users (students, employers and the community).

Baker (1997) and Harvey (1998) both note that, in higher education, quality has been used in five ways:

- excellence (that is, quality is something special or exceptional, something with high standards which can only be attained in limited circumstances and is based on high quality inputs—the best students, best resources, best teachers, and so on)
- consistency, or perfection (that is, the absence of defects, the 'right every time' approach)
- fitness for purpose (that is, quality is relative to a particular activity, product or service; fitness for purpose is determined either by the customers or it is based on achieving the mission of an organisation or activity)
- value for money (this is closely aligned with the customer specification approach to fitness for purpose)
- transformation (transformative quality is characterised in terms of enhancement of the participant and empowerment of the participant)

It is the 'transformative' quality that Baker (1997) feels is very apt for education:

> ... as education is not a service where something is done for the consumer, but where something is do to and with the student. (p.4)

To explain transformation, Harvey (1998) states that:

> Transformative education is about 'adding value' to the students by enhancing their attributes but it is also about empowering them as critical, reflective, transformative, lifelong learners ... Education is not a service for a customer—but an ongoing transformation of the participant ... Education is a participative process. Students are not customers or consumers, they are participants. (p.244)

A reading of Harvey on quality in higher education suggests that there are two different purposes for implementing quality, the teacher being more likely to subscribe to the second:

- One view is that quality is implemented so that the education sector can be held accountable—it can be shown to be using public funds wisely and achieving ultimate goals of students in jobs and students satisfied with their studies

- Another view is that quality is implemented so as to transform individuals. Education enhances people's lives, thus quality in education is about improving the learning experience so that people feel their lives are transformed by undertaking education.

Another way of describing quality, in the words of Langford (undated) is:

> Quality in education is creating a learner for life. Quality in education is what makes learning a pleasure and a joy. You can improve some measures of accomplishment by using awards, threats and punishments, but the results will be short lived and you will pay the penalty elsewhere. It takes a quality experience in education to create a learner for life. The quality experience varies with the age of the learner. It takes constant engagement to create a quality education. (p.7)

In the following, he goes one step further:

> Quality is a new way of seeing and thinking about the very relationship between the teacher and the learner. (Langford & Cleary 1995, p.xi)

And, about the impact of quality on the education system, Langford notes:

> The impact of quality does not lie in any cookbook approach to change. Instead, it is embodied in the remarks of teachers who say they feel 'released, and free to think'. The impact of quality is found in teachers who turn to their students for learning, in students who become facilitators of their own and others' learning, in administrators who say, 'this concept has changed my life' and in leaders who say 'I've gained so much by letting go'. (Langford & Cleary 1995, p.xii)

In his definition of quality, Langford's focus is on the quality principles 'to improve the outcome, improve the process'.

Langford and Tribus (1997) both view the bottom line in education and training as improved learning—this is the whole point of implementing a quality system—to ensure that learning improves since learning is the process that produces the product.

> The bottom line in education is not money saved or spent, but learning and its impact on society. (Langford 1999, p.23)

Langford and Tribus both agree that when students have energy and enthusiasm for what they are learning, this is quality learning. Such energy and enthusiasm come from commitment and it is the teacher's job to create an environment in which students are aroused and want to learn—that is, they are intrinsically motivated to learn.

Quality is the new way to think about, organise and implement whatever it is you do. In a training organisation, this statement applies to teachers, trainers and support staff in the same way it does to managers. The writings and presentations of Tribus and Langford at the Office of Training and Further Education Focus on Quality conferences (Melbourne 1998 and 1999) emphasise that, if we are serious about wanting to improve the quality of our education and training systems, we must focus on the daily interaction between teachers and students and the learning that results from this—total quality learning, not just total quality management.

With many different definitions of quality being offered by experts, it is not surprising that the notion of quality, particularly in an education context where outcomes are difficult to quantify, is elusive and complex.

Factors influencing the quality of education

A review of literature about quality in education indicates that there are many key components to a quality approach within educational institutions. Themes that were chosen as a focus for this study, given the stage the VET sector had reached in terms of its implementation of quality, were:

- creating a client focus

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- using data to measure or monitor performance
- training and staff development

The aim of this section is to review the writings that influenced the design of the research for this study, not to report on the considerable research on these issues within VET.

Creating a client focus

Haworth and Conrad (1997) provide principles and guidance for developing and sustaining high-quality programs in higher education. Their insights are as relevant to VET as they are to higher education. They describe a set of four guiding principles to be used when improving the quality of academic programs. These principles, in essence, describe the type of activity that results from implementing a quality system within an academic organisation. They also provide an introduction to the notion of how to create a client focus within the teaching–learning process. The authors point out:

> Continuous learning ... requires faculty and administrators to turn a mirror on what they actually do in their programs and to collect data on how these practices affect the quality of the students' learning. (Haworth & Conrad 1997, p.170)

The principles are:

- a constant commitment to student learning
- people make quality happen: students, employers and graduates should be invited to comment regularly on program experiences and suggest improvements via alumni councils, employer advisory boards, open forums, focus group interviews, exit interviews and classroom research. The authors make the point that continuous improvement can only occur if administrators and teachers examine the programs they offer and probe them through the eyes of those who use them
- learning never ends: the authors warn that examining programs can be a 'relatively meaningless episodic process targeted primarily at satisfying external mandates rather than a useful continuous one aimed at understanding and improving the quality of student learning' (p.170). They quote other writers who believe that faculty and administrators must constantly examine and seek to learn about the inner workings of their own programs:
  - What instruction and curricular practices do students and graduates find most useful and challenging, or indeed useless and boring?
  - What learning experiences do stakeholders cite as 'adding the most value' in terms of student learning outcomes?
  - How does the learning environment (particularly students' interaction with each other and with teachers) enhance or hinder students' learning?
  - Where does the 'real' learning take place for students?
- thinking multi-dimensionally, using multiple methods of assessment, since program quality should not be assessed from just one vantage point: the authors recommend that multiple methods be used to assess the quality of academic programs. These can include:
  - course-embedded assessment methods, such as student portfolios
  - classroom assessment techniques
  - employer and graduate surveys
  - focus groups
  - exit interviews with graduating students
  - document review

This type of information, along with the results of quantitative surveys of students and employers and graduates, is giving a 'dynamic, multi-faceted empirical foundation for understanding and in turn making improvements in a program's overall quality' (p.172).

The authors note that using a variety of methods helps to produce more accurate and trustworthy findings and negates the weakness inherent in a solitary approach to quality assessment. They conclude:

> These principles suggest a process—or a set of 'best practices' for assessing and improving program quality. They are intended to help faculty and administrators understand how to assess and improve the quality of undergraduate and graduate programs.
>
> (Haworth & Conrad 1997, p.173)

Thus, in the present study, it was decided to include specific questions during the focus group discussions about the data that teachers gather from students, and from other clients such as employers, in order to find out to what extent this data-gathering was formal, to what extent it was part of the quality system, and to what extent it was turned into improvements to the teaching–learning process.

Systemic and local performance measurement

Levesque, Bradby and Rossi (1996) encourage schools to use data for program improvement in the United States. While their observations relate to the school sector in USA, they are pertinent to the VET sector in Australia.

These researchers make the observation that schools collect a great deal of data, but typically do not use this data to identify strengths and weaknesses at their sites and from there develop improvement strategies. One reason for the lack of data use is the perception that data are being collected for someone else's use.

The authors further observe that, while performance reports provided to state agencies may include information such as achievement test scores, rates of placement in employment and further education (for VET students), or rates of completion, state-provided data often do not lead to local improvement efforts for a variety of reasons:

- Principals may find district and school-level data useful for public relations purposes, but teachers do not find such data useful for assessing their own or students' performance.
- Local administrators and educators do not find that state-provided data reflect what they are trying to do in their community.
- Local administrators and instructors are more likely to use data if they personally participated in developing the performance measures and related instruments.

The authors suggest that performance indicators should be 'rooted in local goals' (p.4) and this can be done by:

- involving local educators in designing performance measurement systems
- moving to a framework where data are used locally rather than being reported to someone else
- providing technical assistance to increase the capacity of local educators to use data critically.

These authors suggest that performance indicator systems are more effective if they incorporate three elements:

- student outcomes; that is, what we want students to know or achieve (academic achievement, employability or work-readiness skills, placement into higher education or employment)
- school practices; that is, curriculum, instructional strategies and supporting structures such as scheduling practices
- school inputs; that is, the 'givens' such as student demographics, local economic conditions, facilities and school funds.

The next step in developing a performance indicator system is to identify sources of data and to develop indicators that describe outcomes, practices and inputs. Educators should seek to use

existing sources of data and, if this is inadequate, then they should start planning alternative data-collection methods.

Existing data sources may include enrolment records, average daily attendance records, transcripts, student records, standardised achievement scores, disciplinary action records, student follow-up surveys, college entrance exams, funds and expenditures per pupil, and community surveys or needs assessments.

Additional data-collection methods may include special surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, teacher logs and diaries, classroom observations and alternative assessment instruments.

When identifying actual indicators Levesque, Bradby and Rossi (1996) recommend that multiple indicators be used for each outcome, practice or input. 'Teaching and learning are complex processes, and a single indicator will rarely adequately describe a particular construct or concern' (p.5). For example, if a school's goal is high academic achievement for all students, then educators may want to know:

- what percentage of graduates complete high level academic coursework
- what proportion of teachers report integrating academic and vocational learning on a regular basis
- what the average achievement test score is for the school and whether it is increasing or decreasing over time.

The final step of the program improvement involves interpreting data and developing improvement strategies. Effective interpretation therefore requires:

> - determining appropriate cohort to examine each indicator (for example, last year's graduates, this year's seniors)
> - determining the appropriate unit of analysis (for example, the school, a grade level, or individual classrooms)
> - identifying important subpopulations (for example, examining data by gender and race-ethnicity). (Levesque, Bradby & Rossi 1996, p.5)

Over time, a performance indicator system provides schools with trend data to determine whether improvement strategies are working. The authors note:

> Program improvement team members meet periodically to review the indicator data; determine whether performance is improving; discuss reasons why improvement is or is not happening and refine their indicators and improvement strategies. The team also decides with whom to share the performance information. (Levesque, Bradby & Rossi 1996, p.6)

Thus, in the present study, it was decided to include in the focus group discussion a number of questions relating to how teachers monitored their own performance and the data they used to do this.

Staff development and training

Ashworth and Harvey (1993), writing about assessing quality in further and higher education in the United Kingdom observe that:

> One of the biggest barriers to quality in further and higher education is poor teaching ... the maintenance of a high standard of teaching can be helped by ensuring that teachers are appropriately trained, developed and appraised. (Ashworth & Harvey 1993, p.97)

Smart (1997) concludes that training is one of the few tools that will quickly and directly impact on the entire organisation.

The VET system is based on the premises that training, and therefore learning, is beneficial, that training is the means by which an organisation and indeed the country achieves the skills it needs,

and that training is the key to advancement economically and socially. Therefore, it would be expected that training organisations would ensure that their own staff are undergoing training and professional development; that is, the training organisation should practise what it preaches and invest in its own people.

The article concludes:

> Few tools exist that quickly and directly impact on the entire organisation effectively. One of the most powerful however is training. Implemented properly, it has enormous potential to influence individuals and organisations as a whole. (Smart 1997, p.57)

Thus, it was decided that the focus group discussions for this study should include questions about professional development and staff training activity.

The findings from the focus group discussion relating to these three factors (gathering data, monitoring performance and staff development) are reported in chapter 5.

5 Findings from consultations

In a nutshell, the questionnaires and discussions with 117 teachers across eight TAFE institutes in 1998 revealed that:

- The definition of quality varies and it is important to establish what teachers understand by this term and how they see it being put into practice in their work environment.
- There have been many changes in the VET sector, which have all had the potential to impact on the teaching–learning experience. One of these changes has been the implementation of a quality system.
- How teachers feel about their jobs and the organisations they work for has an effect on how they view quality.
- Quality is having an impact, but so far it has not led to the paradigm shift that practitioners such as Tribus and Langford say must occur.

This section is based on findings from the questionnaires and the focus group discussions (appendix C) in the eight institutes participating in the study. The findings are reported in terms of:

- what the term 'quality' means to teachers in the VET sector
- implications of the two perceptions of quality
- the range of quality initiatives identified by teachers
- changes teachers identified as a result of these quality initiatives
- resources and support provided by institutes to help in the implementation of quality
- the impact in the classroom of implementing quality
- implications for further research.

What does 'quality' mean to VET teachers?

For this project, two definitions (appendix C-2) were given to teachers to determine their understanding of quality:

- I basically understand quality to be a set of processes and procedures.

  > Quality is excellence in the management of our services, our processes and our products. Quality management focusses an organisation on the needs of its customers, with a view to ensuring ongoing competitiveness and effective use of resources.

- I basically understand quality to be a philosophy and commitment to continuous improvement that is built into the culture of the training organisation.

  > A quality system is a comprehensive, organisation-wide approach to continuous improvement and ensuring consistent quality standards. It involves looking at all aspects of your service and asking 'how can we do things better?' But, you don't just ask the question once. In a quality system, everyone in the organisation continually looks for ways to improve products, services, and timelines, processes—and ultimately, outcomes and client satisfaction.

In each group discussion, teachers selected the second definition as the one they personally subscribed to and worked towards and which best reflected the professional culture they shared: a commitment to continuous improvement and to educational standards.

By contrast, they felt the first definition reflected the bureaucratic nature of the culture, characterised by quality assurance, processes and procedures, and this was the system teachers perceived management to be implementing.

Implications of the two perceptions of quality

In every institute participating in the study, there seemed to be two cultures present, echoing Cooper's (1998) observations about different cultures co-existing in the university. She describes them as:

1. A 'rationalist bureaucratic culture', which is hierarchical, structured in time and activity. Accountability is achieved through detailed job descriptions, performance indicators, supervision, line management and performance-based contracts. Direct (autocratic) power over those in 'subordinate' positions is conferred by line management, whose own work may be directed by others occupying more 'senior' positions.
2. An 'autonomous professional culture': self-organised, self- and peer-assessed, collegial decision-making.

Table 2: Summary of VET manager and teacher perceptions about quality

	From the point of view of those who manage the VET sector and TAFE institutes	From the point of view of those who facilitate and support learning (teachers, trainers and support staff)
What is quality?	Quality is meeting the needs of the customer. It is concerned with levels of satisfaction and effectiveness. It is fitness for purpose; it is about achieving consistency.	Quality is that which makes learning a pleasure and a joy. It is about excellence of the educational experience. It is about continuous improvement and finding ways to improve outcomes and satisfaction.
Why is it important?	It is a way of showing that the VET sector is accountable for the public funds it spends and achieves what it is meant in terms of—students who have the skills, knowledge, attitudes required for work.	It is a means to ensure that the focus in the classroom is on learning rather than purely teaching. It is a way to ensure students play an active role and are accountable for their own learning.
How should we deal with it?	By implementing the Australian Recognition Framework. By focussing on seven criteria: leadership, customer focus, strategic planning, processes, organisational performance, information and analysis.	By taking steps to involve the students in every aspect of their own learning, from planning the learning experience, to doing it, to working out what are the criteria of a quality learning experience and by assessing whether that has been achieved.
Summary	Accountability approach	Transformative approach

Cooper claims that these organisational cultures co-exist, but there are significant differences between them, a situation which has implications for how first- and second-tier managers operate. While her observations may appear overtly political, they are worth noting because so many teachers echoed these views when discussing the definition of quality.

The way in which quality is currently being implemented defines it, in essence, as a business management framework. Hence, observations about management, leadership and a 'them versus us' way of thinking permeated the discussion of what 'quality' actually is. Cooper's views are included here to remind TAFE managers that the sector needs leaders who can avert the emergence and establishment of conflicting cultures in an organisation, since these intrude on its ability to grow and improve.

Cooper observes that the university relies heavily on the norms of the autonomous professional culture to maintain professional standards and to keep the core business of the university functioning. The same claim can be made for the TAFE college:

> In particular, those working from within the rational bureaucratic culture exploit the autonomous professional culture to maintain academic standards, even when necessary resources are not provided. This exploits the time and the goodwill of staff.
>
> (Cooper 1998, p.45)

Harvey (1998) asks the questions: What is quality? What is the purpose of implementing it? And how should we deal with it? From discussions with TAFE teachers, it would appear that VET management and VET teachers or trainers would answer these questions differently.

It is perceived that, for management, quality is fitness for purpose; it is about achieving consistency and thus it is essentially about accountability. For teachers, quality is concerned with academic excellence and transformation of the individual. These two views are summarised in table 2.

Uses and impacts of quality initiatives

In the preliminary questionnaire, teachers were asked to identify quality initiatives their institutes had established in the previous three years. The aim of this question was to gain an understanding of their experience of quality. The types of quality initiatives that teachers identified are listed in table 3. Since teachers were asked an open-ended question, the table lists the number of examples of each type of quality initiative as well as the number of institutes in which teachers identified this type of initiative.

The most commonly named quality initiatives were those relating to the quality management system (ISO 9000, quality manuals, quality audits) as well as initiatives relating to customer focus (surveys, better enrolment and induction procedures), staff (surveys, in-service training, staff inductions, performance indicators) and management of information (better enrolments records, record-keeping, roll books, documented policies and procedures).

Many teachers also identified national initiatives such as flexible delivery, competency-based training, the Australian Recognition Framework, workplace delivery, user choice and upgrading learning resources as quality initiatives. Few examples were given of quality initiatives relating to teaching, learning and assessment. Examples of each type of quality initiative, listed by institute, are in appendix D.

Having identified the range of quality initiatives, teachers were then asked whether quality initiatives were having an impact on their work. Of the 116 teachers who answered this question in the preliminary questionnaire, 79 (68%) answered 'yes' and identified positive changes; 27 (23%) answered 'no' and identified negative changes, and 10 (9%) were unsure.

Table 3: Quality initiatives identified by TAFE teachers

Quality initiatives	No. of different examples given	No. of institutes involved (n=8)
Initiatives relating to quality management in the institute	18	7
Customer focus	9	7
National VET initiatives	12	5
Initiatives relating to staff	10	7
Administration, management of information	11	6
Physical environment	5	3
Initiatives related to teaching, learning and assessment	6	3

Source: Returns from teacher consultations across the eight institutes in this study. See appendix D for details

Teachers were also asked to identify changes to their work as a result of implementing quality. Again, this was an open-ended question, prompting a wide variety of responses, summarised in table 4. Appendix E contains the complete list, by institute, of teachers' nominated examples of positive changes that resulted from implementing quality.

Table 4: Positive changes identified by TAFE teachers as a result of implementing a quality system

Positive changes that have resulted from implementing quality	No. of different examples given	No. of institutes involved (n=8)
Improvements to administration	11	7
More focus on the learner	3	5
Better assessment practices	6	5
Approach to work is different	12	5
More focus on the customer	2	5
Delivery is better	4	5
Better learning resources	3	4
Better facilities and equipment	2	2
More staff development	3	1

Source: Returns from teacher consultations across the eight institutes in this study. See appendix E-1 for details

The positive changes reflect the types of quality initiatives that teachers identified—the national initiatives, the focus on customers, the focus on administration. The most interesting positive change was the approach to the work. Here, teachers stated that a growing knowledge of quality systems:

- ✧ is empowering, and encourages teachers to look at different ways of improving delivery
- ✧ encourages teachers to self-assess and reflect on teaching practices
- ✧ creates greater enthusiasm for teaching and learning
- ✧ results in greater cohesion and co-operation between teachers
- ✧ encourages teachers to be more innovative and flexible
- ✧ increases authority and responsibility, and therefore satisfaction
- ✧ leads to continual upgrading of skills
- ✧ is creating team ethos within the department.

During discussion, a number of teachers observed that none of the institute quality initiatives was directed at the process of teaching and learning:

> The administrative systems have been given more attention than the adult learning process.
>
> The message is not reaching the classroom.

> I am completely unaffected by the formal quality process at the institute level. I have always endeavoured to provide quality education to my students.
>
> I don't believe the quality system has really been aimed at the teaching programs to any great extent. It has certainly documented the administrative side but it has not changed the face-to-face teaching strategies of staff.

Where teachers gave examples of classroom delivery and assessment changing, this was most likely to be a result of national initiatives such as flexible delivery and workplace assessment, rather than the quality initiatives of the institute itself—although the quality movement within the institute may well have added impetus to the national initiatives.

Overall, the impact on the teaching and learning experience of implementing quality would appear to be superficial, remaining within the boundaries of current approaches to teaching and learning dominated by the notion of 'delivery', which connotes providers and recipients of training, rather than the facilitation of learning.

The negative changes (appendix E-2) were more paperwork and administration to deal with, and thus a greater non-productive workload and less time for preparing lessons, preparing resources, marking, and keeping up to date with new initiatives in VET.

Resources and support from institutes

While many of the teachers consulted identified resources that they had been given in order to support the quality initiatives they were establishing, most of the teachers commented that the available resources were limited and more were needed.

The type of resources that were provided included:

- time release: for example, teacher release to update skills, release hours to develop modules, release to attend meetings
- professional development opportunities in the form of short-day training sessions and in-service training on customer service, student surveys, orientation information, flexible delivery, new computer facilities, quality auditor training, recognition for prior learning training, workplace assessor or trainer training, team building, quality improvement team leadership, ISO 9001 training, and strategic planning training
- sets of written materials: manuals, packages, forms, procedures, checklists, guidelines, and implementation kits
- money for developing flexible delivery, improved computing facilities
- support from the quality unit—quality manuals, documents and internal audit training.

Classroom impact of 'quality': Overview

The term 'classroom' is used to refer to the learning environment, whether this was the classroom, the workplace, or the workshop—wherever learning was taking place. During the discussions with teachers, it became clear that there were three schools of thought regarding the impact of quality in the classroom:

- the positive view: quality is having an impact; it is changing our way of thinking; we listen more to students; we work as a team; we are energised; we go out to industry more
- the negative view: quality is a disruption that increases workload and reduces precious time for core business of preparing classes, teaching, designing resources, exploring new delivery options, and keeping up with VET changes. Teachers with this view thought 'quality' had decreased the quality of classroom teaching and not advantaged students

- a no-change view: we have always listened to students, we have always aspired to improve and deliver a quality education.

Interestingly, during discussion, the views expressed were more negative than the questionnaire responses, which indicated that about two-thirds of the teachers consulted felt that implementing quality had exerted a positive impact on their work; that is, on their teaching.

Teachers who were unsure whether quality has impacted on teaching stated:

- The focus on quality had increased formal paper flow, but had no impact on teaching.
- It was early days, and therefore they were unable to comment on whether implementing quality was having an impact on teaching.
- The relationship between quality initiatives and the coalface was not clear: it was difficult to see a link between an award for business excellence and learning experience.
- They were unable to think of any quality initiatives which had directly increased the quality of education of their students.

These discussions with teachers also identified many factors which affected the teacher's view of quality and its implementation:

- The way in which quality was implemented in the institute has an impact on how teachers feel about it. If it was imposed in a hurry to meet national requirements, there was considerably more resistance.
- Teachers' jobs have changed, and individual teachers' acceptance of the changes affects how they view quality.
- Staff in every institute visited made comments about the 'system' and how it was getting in the way of doing the job. The 'system' usually referred to the way the institute was managed and run. Is it, to use the words of one educator, a 'comatose bureaucracy' or is it a vibrant ecosystem in which learning, learners and teachers flourish and grow?
- Many teachers were concerned by the funding issues, perceiving that there exists a 'get costs lower, cheaper is better mentality' which they see as being at odds with the philosophy of continuous improvement. On the other hand, if everyone in the system worked to identify waste and eliminate it, this view may change.
- The role of training packages was identified as an issue: training packages were not de facto delivery. Many teachers felt that the interaction between teachers and students, which is at the heart of learning, was being ignored and undervalued. At the same time there were high expectations of the role of training packages.
- Lack of leadership was a significant issue. In sections or teaching units where the leader was committed to quality, had vision and acted upon it, there was a mood of energy and excitement about the new perspectives a quality approach would offer. Where such leadership was lacking, there were feelings of weariness and fear of further change.

Rewards, recognition for staff, increases in sessional staff, professional development time, the impact of restructuring institutes, were also raised during discussion of the impact of quality.

Thus, the early view that this project was 'premature' would appear correct in the sense that:

- Quality meant different things to different people.
- Quality in VET had not had a focus on the learning process, except in superficial ways.
- Quality had been implemented as a way to improve business and running of institutes, not as a direct means of improving learning.
- Many other VET initiatives were impacting on teachers' work, and teachers were still in the midst of understanding and coming to terms with these initiatives.

Classroom impact of 'quality': Further findings

To probe further whether quality initiatives were being introduced to the classroom, teachers in the discussion sessions were asked to reflect on three questions (see appendix C-3):

- How did they gather feedback (data) and carry out improvements in class?
- How did they monitor their own performance?
- How did they maintain and develop their professional competence?

The reasoning behind these three questions was that these were areas where one might expect to see quality initiatives having an impact on delivery. Gathering data is a central organising principle of any quality system, as is the continual monitoring of performance. As the main student learning resource is the teacher, it was hypothesised that an institution with a commitment to quality would invest heavily in the skills and knowledge of its teachers.

Gathering data for improvements

In response to the question, *What data do you collect on student learning as a result of the quality initiatives that your training organisation has implemented?*, teachers identified a range of formal and informal techniques that were commonly used.

The list of methods below is a composite based on discussions with teachers in all institutes participating in the study. Its purpose is to show the range of methods used by teachers to gather data for improvements. Areas for further research are an inventory of the survey types conducted within institutes, the usage of the various formal and informal data-gathering methods, and which methods teachers find most valuable.

At least two institutes acknowledged that the quality system had improved record keeping, with a more consistent effort to gather and evaluate feedback from customers.

Types of quality data gathered and used include institute-wide data, course-level surveys, and data collected by teachers in modules or lessons.

Institute-wide data includes:

- (outcome) survey data: some institutes conducted their own surveys of outcomes; others used NCVER student outcomes data
- customer complaint forms
- statistics on attrition rates, module completion rates
- regular surveys of performance and delivery: results (both institute-wide and section-specific) that are sent to managers.

One group of teachers believed that institute-wide statistics were general, open to interpretation, and were not a true picture of what happens on a section-by-section basis. Surveys, other teachers opined, tend to look at the whole physical environment of learning, but such matters are not core business or beyond their realm of influence. They questioned the usefulness of the survey information and the reliability of sampling techniques. The director's unit may 'do something' with survey results, but the loop is not closed, by making the survey intentions and results explicit to the teachers.

Course-level surveys that are used by teachers include:

- pre-course class questionnaires, on student expectations, interests and career plans
- post-course student evaluations, analysed and discussed in section or team meetings
- post-course graduate surveys: to find out about employment outcomes.

In one course discussed, a full-day orientation was conducted which all teachers attended. During this orientation, which was run as a series of workshops, students' expectations were identified. Subsequently, throughout the term, follow-up meetings were held to check on whether expectations and goals were being met.

Data gathered by the teacher from the actual modules and lessons may include module completion rates, module evaluations, regular class surveys, client feedback cards and other assessments conducted by the teacher. Other informal means of gathering data included:

- ❖ industry visits and talking to employers
- ❖ verbal feedback from students: class 'debrief' sessions and informal chats
- ❖ anecdotal evidence about the jobs students are gaining on completion of their courses
- ❖ encouraging students to write down their course comments and suggestions.

Teachers who had students with low levels of literacy, or who were uncomfortable completing forms and questionnaires, tended to rely on personal interviews for feedback.

Generally, data are gathered only from students who attend class. Data from students who withdraw are not collected or reported formally. The extent to which the institutes in this study survey student outcomes on completion of studies was not measured.

Teachers monitoring their own performance

The extent to which teachers monitor their performance seems to depend on the ethos of the team and the leadership within. There was a consensus that, to date, the quality system has had no real impact on the way that teachers monitor their performance.

Teachers tend to monitor their performance by using the data on student learning. They also measure their performance by means such as:

- ❖ class meetings, student feedback or letters of appreciation
- ❖ formal student representative council meetings
- ❖ team meetings, peer feedback, and moderating each others' classes
- ❖ student demand levels and attendance levels (voting with their feet)
- ❖ analyses of enrolments, completions and withdrawals
- ❖ surveys or evaluations conducted by individual teachers
- ❖ students' portfolios, awards, prizes, and quality of jobs attained
- ❖ amounts of fee-for-service work generated by the team.

Many teachers noted that open styles of teaching encourage students to voice concerns. Body language, class interaction, attendance, enthusiasm, and confidence levels, are all signs to the teacher about his or her performance. Generally, this form of self-appraisal is not reported.

In one institute, teachers preferred mechanisms other than student pass rates for evaluating their performance—self-appraisal, moderation by other teachers, student feedback. They stressed that qualitative data must also be gathered to understand withdrawal rates. Should a teacher phone a student about a withdrawal, this would not usually be reported.

All institutes in the study had or were developing systems of recognition for excellence but, in all discussion groups, staff thought such systems were flawed. Staff wanted to be valued at a personal level; for example, through letters, acknowledgments from students, colleagues, heads of school and industry, which could be placed in their portfolios.

Many staff members do things for the college that may not be known or recognised. Teachers feel that if a system of performance indicators exists, then there should be an outcome for those who perform and those who do not—a reward and penalty.

The quality initiatives implemented within the institute do not appear to have impacted on the monitoring that goes on in the classroom, except in an indirect way—some teachers spoke of an increased awareness of student needs and the importance of gaining student feedback.

In one institute, the section concerned with quality was developing a performance indicators package to help teaching sections to monitor their operations and identify key areas for improvement. There would be three types of data, designed to give teaching sections a comprehensive picture of their performance—section course data (results and completion rates sheets), staff feedback sheets and student feedback sheets.

Again, what was gleaned on monitoring performance served only to identify various ways in which teachers choose to monitor their performance. Further research could be undertaken to determine which ways are most widely used and which methods provide the most meaningful information upon which teachers can base decisions about improvements.

Professional development for teachers

Teachers were asked to describe how quality initiatives in the institute encouraged them to continually improve their skills and knowledge and to develop skills relevant to industry.

All institutes in the research study supported a professional development scheme and a return-to-industry program, and had provided workplace assessor training for all staff.

Teachers acknowledged that staff development sections in their institutes offered excellent courses. Course uptake, however, seemed to depend on a teacher's personal motivation to undertake staff development, the capacity of the system to make time available to that teacher (and backfill the position) and the support of the team leader or manager.

Many staff made the point that the opportunity for professional development was available 'on paper' and encouraged, but it was not taken up because there were no incentives, the workload was heavy and morale was low. Moreover, teachers had difficulty weighing up the advantages of undertaking staff development against the educational impact on their students of their being released from class to undertake a staff development program.

In some states, an hour a week was scheduled for professional development, but such a short period limits what can be accomplished. Some teachers 'saved up' hours, but it was unclear if this was legitimate. Others felt it was wasted, usually absorbed into the teaching program. Some sections used it for weekly staff meetings, which were sometimes professional development sessions. Teachers made five main points about professional development:

- There were mechanisms in place for staff development and return-to-industry schemes, but it was up to the individual to pursue opportunities. Motivation was low, and there was little encouragement to get staff to improve skills, in the form of time release, backfilling of duties, or rewards for doing staff development. The quality system did not lead to teachers maintaining and developing their competence.
- A large number of teachers had other jobs or businesses in industry (for example, running a restaurant) and therefore they were keeping their skills up to date. Moreover, a lot of teachers undertook their professional development in their own time.
- Staff development was provided and encouraged although this was often too generic and not industry-specific enough.

- Some of the professional development that teachers undertook, kept them up to date with restructure changes. Such professional development was not aimed at increasing skills, but keeping teachers aware of what was happening: it was compliance training.
- There was no requirement to undertake professional development and no reward; neither was there a penalty if a teacher did not undertake any professional development.

There was no peer review or mentoring support in place for TAFE staff. However, initiatives such as *Framing the future* and *Learnscope* might provide this. At the time when discussions with teachers took place for this study, these initiatives were not widely known or used.

The sample of teachers in the focus group sessions undertook various types of professional development. A very few returned to industry, although others attended industry days or meetings. They participated in short workshops or training sessions (for example, National Training Framework workshops, internet training, forums run by industry training advisory bodies, health and safety, management improvement) aimed primarily at updating staff with new information or skills, for a world of work in which computer literacy and understanding of quality and health and safety are the norm. Others were upgrading educational qualifications to Bachelor of Education status.

In two institutes, some teachers differentiated staff training from professional development. Staff training, they felt, was of benefit to the institute, supported and available. Professional development, such as degree study, benefiting the individual and the institute, generally was not supported. These teachers felt that funding for professional teacher training had been virtually withdrawn and replaced by specific training to meet workplace requirements.

Implications for further research

Many of the insights reported in this study relate to the timing of the research; for example, the fact that so many teachers associated quality initiatives with the quality management system within the institute rather than as something for implementation in the classroom. This perception reflects the fact that, throughout 1997–99, there had been intense activity within the institutes on quality management and its role in improving strategic planning, customer focus, data gathering, organisational performance and so on.

Areas, which this preliminary study has identified for further research, include:

- Research into a means for reconciling the two views of quality (quality as procedures/processes and quality as a philosophy) to achieve a balance within educational institutions needs to be undertaken. At present quality is implemented more on the accountability aspects and less on transformative aspects.
- A follow-up study is required which probes the notion of how teachers' approach to work is different.
- An investigation is required which identifies, from the wide range of surveying activities taking place within institutes, the types of information available to assist teachers to improve the learning experience for students.
- What kind of survey process can be implemented at an institute level to determine from students who leave, withdraw or drop out, their reasons for doing so?
- An assessment is required of the level of staff or professional development taking place, the extent of this activity, whether the institutes themselves are learning organisations and whether the staff development offered is designed to facilitate learning rather than to merely 'deliver training'.

6 Findings on other issues impacting on quality

As a result of discussions with teachers, it became clear that a discussion about quality was made more complex by the many and diverse interpretations of the term, and was further complicated by other changes and other agendas within the VET sector.

Quality is an integral aspect of work; thus, it is inevitable that a discussion on quality would also include discussion of broader issues such as the changing role of the teacher, the administrative duties now expected of the teacher, resource issues, the perceived lack of accountability or leadership in the system, and the restructuring of the TAFE institutes.

The issues reported in this section were raised by teachers at each of the discussion sessions in all eight institutes visited and therefore represent the views of a broad cross-section of teachers. Open discussions, while not providing quantitative data on a topic, were useful as they provided an insight into how teachers in the TAFE institutes felt about their jobs. Furthermore, they provided the researcher with an overview of the types of issues underlying and influencing the central research question.

The other issues which impact on quality being implemented in the classroom are summarised in this section under two broad headings: changes to the role of the teacher and other factors which impact on how teachers view quality. Any work which builds on this preliminary study should take account of the issues identified here as affecting the implementation of quality and the impact of quality on teaching–learning.

Changing teacher roles in TAFE

The general message that emerged from the 1998 consultations with teachers was that:

- Institute staff are tired of change. It is said that any change management process will bring the following range of reactions among those affected: anger, denial, resistance and acceptance. At this stage, among the staff who chose to participate in discussions, there were many who were experiencing anger, denial and resistance. Those who had reached the acceptance stage displayed energy and enthusiasm for the quality system.

  Ivan Webb (1998) made the observation that systems can be unstable, due to faulty processes, untrained or misinformed people or too many disruptions. He recommended that systems should be stabilised before trying to improve on them. Perhaps it is now time for the VET sector in Australia to work towards a period of equilibrium and stability.

- The job of the TAFE teacher has expanded in recent years, due to national initiatives, such as the competency-based approach to training and assessment and flexible delivery, and changes resulting from amalgamations and mergers.

- The administrative load on teachers has increased, due to implementing quality and to changes in staff roles within institutes.

However, there were flashes of good news too! In departments with innovative and dynamic leaders, teachers described the new client outlook as a challenge, which had the potential to realise rewards rather than being an imposition.

In one department visited, teachers noted that their jobs involved less time in classroom delivery. More time was now being spent on workplace and on-site delivery as well as on providing support services to industry trainers. These teachers spoke with enthusiasm about the new relationship they had with their industry.

They had gone from being a class-bound unit with dwindling student numbers to a growing unit with strong links to industry and partnerships with over 90 employers. These teachers had embraced all the changes accompanying the new standards, new curriculum, and flexible delivery, and saw them as the key to their survival. They had developed quality systems to manage their industry work placement program. This type of response was atypical. Most teachers spoke with weariness of the changes they were experiencing.

Teachers' views in the focus papers on their changing roles are summarised here in terms of pressure of work and lack of support, TAFE restructures, range of teacher duties, and increased administrative load.

Work pressure and lack of support

At the time of the consultations for this project, teachers in all institutes spoke of the ways in which their jobs had changed and the pressure that they were experiencing. This pressure was sometimes attributed to the quality system and sometimes attributed to the changes in general taking place within TAFE institutes and the TAFE sector as a whole.

Teachers generally agreed that teaching was a fulfilling job, but many teachers were finding their jobs frustrating. There was much talk of 'just surviving', which indicated pressure. They felt that the 'system' was not providing them with the support mechanism they needed.

In some institutes, teachers worked nights and weekends on home computers, because there was no computer at work. They felt the extra time put in was not recognised. In all institutes visited, teachers believed that there were no real system rewards. Teachers fulfilling their contracts well were not rewarded with another, but had to re-apply for their jobs.

In most institutes, teachers felt that the institute benefits from their professional goodwill, which needed to be nurtured through a system of rewards and recognition, supporting teachers rather than impeding them. Teachers who worked hard to embrace change and win contracts in the commercial sector were neither rewarded nor recognised. The reward for good work, they said, is more good work! Equally, there were no penalties for those who did not exert themselves and who didn't act upon new initiatives.

Teachers felt that extra quality demands were affecting teaching, with feelings of frustration and stress. There was no forum where issues could be discussed. In an environment in which teachers felt alienated, isolated and wary of change, new quality initiatives were viewed with suspicion. The morale of many teachers was low but morale was the key to teachers feeling positive about the impact of quality on the teaching–learning experience.

Teachers working with team leaders who embraced change seemed less disappointed with the lack of rewards and recognition. For them, recognition came informally, from fellow teachers and colleagues, from comments made by industry trainers. They spoke about the satisfaction of seeing students grow and develop and of managers who appreciated staff.

Restructures, and widening teacher duties

Many institutes have experienced a period of turmoil with restructures, mergers and instability. This upheaval has impacted on the psyche of the organisation and the willingness of staff to embrace change and implement quality in the way it should be implemented.

Some staff have been through several restructures. Each new re-organisation demands enormous effort from the staff. Often, subsequent restructure undoes the work of the previous restructure. As a result, staff are left feeling disillusioned.

Teachers are tired of dealing with change. For some, the work environment has no security, there are constant rumours, the future of departments is unknown, there is the possibility of moving to another college. In short, there is severe uncertainty in the air.

The role of the teacher has changed as a result of changes in institute structure, the competency-based approach to training, flexible delivery and user choice. Teachers are now responsible for duties once the domain of administrators and non-teaching staff.

Teachers have new duties, besides marking, preparation, and conducting assessments:

- locating students (particularly for access programs)
- budgeting, tender and report writing, recording enrolments and attendance
- taking responsibility for quality, and participating in audits
- writing training plans, tracking competencies, arranging student work in industry
- attending industry meetings, liaising with industry, finding sponsors
- locating available national and industry materials
- marketing and designing new courses
- keeping up with administrative requirements.

In some departments, servicing commercial clients has meant that teachers are expected to undertake a variety of tasks for a large proportion of their time, and therefore they have little opportunity to reflect and be innovative. There is pressure to meet each commercial contract.

According to one teacher: 'Teachers are expected to be psychologists, counsellors, marketers, teachers and entrepreneurs'. Another teacher drew attention to the importance of the role of the teacher in motivating, counselling and supporting students and how this role has not been recognised or included in the quality strategy of the institute:

> I am well aware of and I actively support the notion that students take responsibility for their own learning. However, this principle is not taking into account the major societal changes which have occurred over the last 20 years which have resulted in young adults being on the whole far less self-motivated and far less focussed on their education than previous generations. I feel that the effort we teachers have to put in to motivate, counsel and support our students is neither recognised nor considered important by senior management. However, in my opinion, it is a vital role. It improves the quality of the students who successfully complete our courses and is a major societal influence which surely should be included in the institute's quality strategy.

Increased administrative load

There is more workplace contact, but there may be cuts to office staff. Thus, the teacher's job contains a higher administration component. Administrative and support staff change frequently in some institutes, resulting in the loss of consistency and of shared history.

In one state, teachers felt a conflict between the administrative work and the essential nature of the job—teaching. This could be a reflection of the change process: in the early stages of implementing change, the new tasks—keeping better records, having processes to track student progress—take a disproportionate amount of time until they become ingrained and an accepted part of work. In these early days, they are time-consuming and this means less time on preparation of resources and classroom activities. Teachers speak of being 'bogged down in bureaucracy'.

In every group in which quality was discussed, teachers made the point that quality should be driven by professional values rather than economic forces, echoing the observations made by Cooper (1998) and Harvey (1998) relating to the different purposes for which quality is implemented and the different understandings of what quality means.

This commitment to continuous improvement in the teaching–learning process seems to be a personal initiative or characteristic, rather than a result of quality initiatives implemented in the institute. Commitment and a conscientious approach to the job is a double-edged sword, because teachers feel they work in a climate where they have insufficient time for preparation of lessons and teaching materials. Consequently, they are not delivering training or providing learning experiences that meet with their own internal standards or expectations.

Another issue of particular concern to teachers was that of contact time. Traditionally, teachers' time is allocated between student contact, preparation, and administration or professional development time.

In at least one state, there is a problem in how the term 'teacher contact time' is interpreted: is it classroom contact time or does it include time in industry? Some teachers found that supporting students in industry was not considered 'contact time' and thus they questioned how flexible delivery was truly to be achieved if all parts of the system were not committed to this common goal.

During discussion, all groups spoke of the paperwork now taking up teachers' time:

- keeping better records of attendance and better records of student interviews, assessments and contact with industry
- audits: implementing quality has become synonymous with audits for many teachers. These include National Australian Testing Authority audits every six months as part of the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) certification; industry audits if a program is offered through joint recognition; internal audits; and the 'module enrolment no attendance' audit (now known as invalid module enrolments)
- mail system: too much email is generated which means teachers can spend excessive time sorting through large numbers of messages
- completing forms and getting the right signatures and counter signatures on forms, tasks which can be time-consuming and frustrating.

Other factors affecting teacher views of quality

In addition to all of the changes to the teacher's role, teachers' views of quality were influenced by their views about the budget cuts within institutes, their views on management, the staffing within institutes, and their view of the ultimate aim of the VET system. The common theme underlying each of these factors is that events taking place at management level in terms of budgets, staffing, management approach to quality, and major VET initiatives, are incompatible with the teacher's view of quality. To them, quality implies educational standards and the actual learning experience offered to students.

While most teachers were critical of management, they empathised with managers as they too were 'under siege', given the enormous demands made upon them by the VET system's push for efficiency and accountability, through performance measures and funding arrangements.

Budget and staffing pressures

Implementing quality has come at a time of budget cuts in institutes. Teachers believe that these cuts are having an impact on the vocational education and training they provide. It is hard to maintain quality when, for example, equipment is inadequate, poorly maintained or not up to date,

when there are not enough computers, when whole departments are closed down and when there are fewer face-to-face teaching hours.

For teachers, the dollar-driven philosophy means that TAFE is less for apprentices and more for commercial activity. The decreasing pot of money for VET has to stretch a long way. There is a chronic lack of support in the system—lack of administrative support, lack of professional development (despite the large range of short courses on offer to staff), and lack of educational and peer support.

The driving force in the system appears to be economics rather than a concern for quality; a 'get costs lower, cheaper is better' mentality. In one institute, teachers were concerned that, while reducing costs is one business strategy to achieve efficiency, you can only go so far with this strategy—the organisation risks damage.

All teachers noted that the number of sessional staff within institutes was rising. These staff may bring current industry experience into the team, but often have no training skills. They can be seen as an appendage to the department in that they walk in, do a job and walk out. Generally, they do not see themselves as having commitment to a particular section.

The mix of part-time and full-time staff members in a section affects the culture and flexibility of departments. Departments with about 25 full-time teachers seemed less flexible and innovative than similar-sized sections with a mix of full-time and part-time staff. Part-time staff do bring current industry knowledge with them. Many, however, may not have the skills to facilitate learning, the inclination to undertake necessary staff development, or the time to contribute to the working of the whole unit.

To summarise, teachers perceive that resources are being pared to the bone, that they are forced to do more with less, and that implementing quality means, in essence, paying lip service to quality since the resources are inadequate for maintaining educational standards.

Teacher perceptions of management and the quality system

Where quality initiatives have been imposed by management and implemented quickly, there is more resistance and the initiatives are seen as unstructured, unplanned and reactive. There appears therefore to be little commitment from management to quality implementation.

At half the institutes visited, there appeared to be a 'them and us' mentality among teachers and management. Teachers felt they received no support and experienced a sense of being under siege: too many demands were being placed both on teachers and on managers. Managers, they felt, don't walk about and talk to staff—they don't listen. Conducting surveys, the new way of 'listening', is not the same.

The quality process should support staff. As far as many staff were concerned, this was not happening. Some teachers expressed the view that implementing quality had created a whole new bureaucracy with a new department devoted to strategic planning. The system had become a beast, which no longer supported core business. Teachers who achieved excellence and delivered a good service to their students did so despite the system. The system, if performing well, did so because of the goodwill of those in the system.

At one institute, management was criticised: management was perceived to use the quality assurance system as a way of avoiding the hard issues. Managers were responsible for taking action, but this responsibility was attributed to the 'system'. It was unclear who did what, hence, the view of the 'system' as a sterile and separate entity, rather than being the sum total of all the efforts of the individuals in the organisation interacting with each other as an ecosystem.

Quality had been implemented from the top down, in the view of some teachers. Had it been implemented from the ground up, it would not have developed into a 'monster'. Teachers noted the need for balance and a prime focus on teaching. If quality implementation underlined aspects

of education far removed from teaching and learning—such as car parking, canteen and security amenities—then it bore little relevance to teachers.

Leadership of the team and of the institute was crucial if quality was to have an impact on the work that teachers do. Change was seen to be a positive force if a leader had this view of change. Thus, how people feel about their jobs affects their view of quality. How they feel about their jobs is affected in turn by their leaders.

Teacher views of the VET system

Teachers made a number of points about how they perceived the direction of the VET system nationally, indicating feelings of cynicism and frustration resulting from the imperative to reduce costs and improve delivery of training to a wide range of clients.

Furthermore, the emphasis on training packages suggests they are the key to quality of delivery, yet the interaction between the teacher and student, which is at the heart of learning, was ignored or undervalued. This interaction needed to be nurtured by support systems, peer review, mentoring and sharing ideas.

Another aspect of the VET sector was the increasing array of clients for teachers to service—students, employers, government, the 'industry', and VET statistics collections. Teachers felt that all these clients were competing for their service. They knew that their primary clients were students and employers, but nevertheless felt that a larger part of their work was meeting the needs of other clients.

Summary

A discussion of quality necessitates an examination of what all the people in the group understand by this term.

It also involves understanding the organisation—how it is managed, how people feel about their jobs, their attitude to change. It is important to note the recent history of the organisation: a period of instability and upheaval will affect people's outlooks. In such an environment, some staff can feel isolated and alienated.

It is often argued (see Management Advisory Board & Management Improvement Advisory Committee 1996, pp.16–17) that, while there is never an ideal time, timing is still important in the implementation of major organisational benchmarking and quality initiatives.

Thus, this chapter suggests that some teachers have viewed the institute-wide implementation of quality with suspicion, because in their minds it coincides too closely with institutional restructures or downsizing. However, there are also those within the institutes who have embraced change, and who derive positive paths and new energy from such initiatives, as they seek to apply the underlying philosophy to the way they work.

The full range of views from the negative to the positive was expressed during the focus groups. The value of these discussions lies in the insights they bring to the environment in which quality is being implemented.

A project that was under way at the time of the consultations (see Harris et al. 2001) surveys in a more rigorous way some of the changes to the role of the VET teacher taking place as a result of the new performance and quality culture. It tends to confirm what this study found; that is, somewhat of a drift towards 'corporate' or 'compliance' related professional development over professional development for individuals.

Further work also needs to be undertaken to identify and elaborate on the views of managers and leaders within the institutes in relation to quality and its impact on teaching and learning.

7 Insights from the literature

> What matters in learning is not to be taught but to wake up. (Haddon 1992)

The non-empirical part of the study involved researching and evaluating some of the recent literature on the impact of the implementation of quality in the classroom, and participating in seminars and a four-day workshop run by Myron Tribus and David Langford, guests of the Australian Quality Council from the United States of America. This component of the research revealed that:

- Implementing quality applies not only to the management and administration of training organisations, but is applicable to and practicable for the classroom. To date, the VET sector has not made the classroom or learning environment a specific focus of the quality system. This is a major gap in the implementation of quality.
- Quality, defined by practitioners like Tribus and Langford, who use quality approaches and tools in the classroom is, simply, 'what makes learning a pleasure and a joy':

  > Quality in education is what makes learning a pleasure and a joy. You can improve some measures of accomplishment by using awards, threats and punishments, but the results will be short lived and you will pay the penalty elsewhere. It takes a quality experience in education to create a learner for life. It takes constant engagement to create a quality education. (Langford undated, p.7)

- Making learning the core of what happens in the vocational education and training sector is essential, if the sector is to adopt lifelong learning as one of its goals.

This chapter reports on alternative definitions for quality, which apply to the learning environment and on practical suggestions and ideas for teachers and trainers, who want to apply the philosophy of quality to their students and thereby help to create lifelong learners. Thus, the chapter deals with:

- the learning paradigm
- the knowledge that underpins quality learning
- what 'quality learning' means in practice
- how quality learning and lifelong learning are inextricable.

The learning paradigm

Implementing quality means transferring the focus away from teaching as the main process taking place in the classroom to learning, which in turn brings new roles to both the teacher and the student. This is a fundamental shift, a paradigm shift, in the way teachers and others in educational institutions think about teaching and learning. The quality principles for VET make repeated mention of 'training products and services' but not learning. Yet this is the core activity of the sector—learning is the product. Tribus (1998) makes the observation that learning happens when you look at how to solve a problem, teaching is what happens when someone shows you how to solve a problem.

Tribus also observes that, at present, we tend to measure success in education by how many questions a learner can answer. He feels this is the wrong approach. We should be measuring our success as educators by how many questions our learners formulate.

Flynn (1999) refers to an influential article by Barr and Tagg (1995), in which they draw the distinction between an instruction paradigm where the focus is on the teacher and the learning paradigm where the focus is on the learner (see table 5).

Writing about the community colleges in the United States of America, Flynn argues that the challenge facing them is 'the need to place learning first in every decision and action' (p.10). The same could be made about the VET sector in Australia.

Table 5: The instructional paradigm vs the learning paradigm

Features of the instruction paradigm	Features of the learning paradigm
Focus is on the teacher.	Focus is on the learning.
Teaching is the core or central activity of the institution.	Learning is the core or central activity of the institution.
The institution provides instruction to students.	The institution produces learning in students.
Learning is the responsibility of the student.	Learning is the responsibility of all the staff in the institution as well as the student.
Curriculum design is based on what the teacher knows how to teach.	Curriculum design is based on analysis of what the student needs to know in a complex world.
The institution consists of compartmentalised departments.	The institution consists of cross-disciplinary co-operatives.
The institution is judged often by the quality of the entering class.	The institution is judged by the quality of aggregate learning growth possessed by its graduates.

Source: Barr & Tagg (1995) cited in Flynn (1999)

Flynn describes the learning paradigm as follows:

> The concept of the learning paradigm is not a concept that can be applied to one portion of a college. It must permeate all aspects of its structure, fabric and culture to effectively complete the paradigm shift. Planning, resource allocation, facilities design, curriculum development, policy governance, the infusion of technology into pedagogy, and the nature and quality of all supportive services must be aligned with the vision of a college unified in causing, enhancing and producing student learning. (Flynn 1999, p.13)

To emphasise the significance of a learning approach, Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) make the point that teaching is an overrated function, quoting from Carl Rogers, who stated over 30 years ago that:

> Teaching, in my estimation, is a vastly over-rated function. Teaching means 'to instruct'. Personally, I am not much interested in instructing another in what he should know or think. 'To impart knowledge or skill'. My reaction is, why not be more efficient, using a book or programmed learning? 'To make to know'. Here my hackles rise. I have no wish to make anyone know something. 'To show, guide, direct'. As I see it, too many people have been shown, guided, directed. So I come to the conclusion that I do mean what I say. Teaching is, for me, a relatively unimportant and vastly overvalued activity.
>
> (Carl Rogers 1969, p.103 quoted in Knowles, Holton & Swanson 1998, p.84)

Rogers also makes the point that teaching and the imparting of knowledge makes sense only in an unchanging environment. However, in a world where change is rapid, facilitation of learning must be the aim of education. Thus, Rogers defines the role of the teacher as that of a facilitator of learning. The critical element in performing this role is the potential relationship between the facilitator and the learners, a relationship which is dependent on the facilitator possessing three attitudinal qualities—realness or genuineness; non-possessive, caring, prizing, trust and respect; and empathetic understanding and sensitive and accurate listening

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Knowles, Holton and Swanson's (1998) differentiation between teaching and facilitation of learning is summarised in table 6. Quoting Rogers, Knowles, Holton and Swanson propose guidelines for the learning facilitator:

- The facilitator sets the initial mood or climate of the group or class experiences.
- The facilitator helps to elicit and clarify the purposes of the individual in the class. Individuals should feel a sense of freedom to express what it is they would like to do, because this creates a climate for learning.
- The facilitator uses the drives and purposes of each individual as the motivational force behind learning.
- The facilitator organises and makes easily available the widest possible range of resources for learning.
- The facilitator is a flexible resource for the group. The facilitator can play the role of counsellor, lecturer, and adviser, depending on the needs of the group.
- The facilitator accepts both rationalising and intellectualising, also deep personal feelings.
- The facilitator becomes a participant learner, and as a member of the group expresses his or her views as one individual member of the group.
- The facilitator shares feelings with the group. Thus, the facilitator can express feelings in giving feedback to students and share his or her own satisfactions or disappointments.
- The facilitator is alert to group members who express deep or strong feelings and endeavours to understand these and to communicate empathy and understanding. By accepting tensions such as these, the facilitator can bring them into the open for constructive understanding and use by the group.
- The facilitator recognises and accepts his or her own limitations.

Table 6: Functions and skills of the teacher vs those of the learner facilitator

	Role	Skills required
Teacher	• Person responsible for what students learn • Planner of content • Transmitter of content • Controller of how students receive and use content • Tester to check students have received content	• Primarily presentation skills
Facilitator of learning	• Process designer • Manager of learning • Helper	• Relationship building skills • Needs assessment skills • Involving student in planning learning • Linking students to learning resources • Encouraging student initiative

Source: Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998)

These ideas about facilitating learning, specifically the principles of facilitating adult learning, are not new. They have been debated and discussed for many years and are included to some extent in modern approaches to teaching. However, they are still, in many instances, an add-on. For example, the workplace trainer 'category 2' competency standards and training materials, developed in the late 1990s, focus primarily on presentation skills (planning, delivering, using training) although they do include one module on adult learning.

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Before we can start to evaluate the impact quality is having on the classroom, we have to arrive at an understanding common to the VET sector of what quality can mean to the learning process. As noted earlier ANTA defines quality as:

> The level of satisfaction with and effectiveness of vocational education and training organisations, their products and services, established through conformity with the requirements set by clients and stakeholders. (ANTA 1999, p.22)

Langford and Cleary (1995) propose the following definition, which is closer to the core activity of education and Flynn's description of the learning paradigm:

> Quality is a new way of seeing and thinking about the very relationship between the teacher and the learner. (Langford & Cleary 1995, p.xi)

They continue:

> The impact of quality does not lie in any cookbook approach to change. Instead, it is embodied in the remarks of teachers who say they feel 'released, and free to think'. The impact of quality is found in teachers who turn to their students for learning, in students who become facilitators of their own and others' learning, in administrators who say, 'this concept has changed my life' and in leaders who say 'I've gained so much by letting go'. (Langford & Cleary 1995, p.xii)

Knowledge underpinning quality learning

Langford (1998) is of the belief that, before we can understand the meaning behind a shift from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm, we must understand a body of knowledge that underpins this. This body of knowledge includes an understanding of insights from brain research, a philosophy of quality, a systems approach, and statistical thinking.

Insights from brain research

Brain research, according to Langford, tells us that:

- People learn better when they understand why they are learning—when they see relevance.
- If we challenge students to perform, they can achieve great results. However, if we threaten students to perform, they may get poor results and feel great pressure.

Each of us has areas of dominance in our brain and we therefore respond better to some learning styles than others. Thus, teachers should ensure that they cover all of the learning styles in the learning experiences that they design—cognitive, physical, affective and intuitive. An alternative to this taxonomy of learning styles is Gardener's framework of seven types of intelligence—logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, body/kinaesthetic, musical/rhythmic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal.

A philosophy of quality

The body of thought that underpins quality learning, summarised by Langford as 'quality belief statements', is reminiscent of Deming's 14 points (Deming 1994):

- All people want to learn and can learn and therefore learning is intrinsic.
- Learning should be exciting, compelling and mentally stimulating.
- Students can take responsibility for their own learning and therefore students can and should plan their learning process and track their own progress.
- Students are not products; learning is the product and students help to produce this quality product as our colleagues.
- Students can learn and implement quality processes and understand system knowledge.

- ✧ Grading is not a motivator; it only serves to defeat the majority.
- ✧ Most of the reward is in work itself.
- ✧ Failing is a learning experience.
- ✧ Fear and humiliation inhibit learning.
- ✧ Quality cannot be achieved through mass inspection.
- ✧ Quality leadership is essential at all levels.

What systems thinking tells us

We are all part of a system, we are all interconnected and unable to escape from this. It is the manager's job to work on the system to improve it with the help of his or her colleagues and workmates. In the case of teachers, the class is a system and the role of the teacher is to work on improving the class with the help of the students and other people such as employers, supervisors, parents and the support staff. Thus, the improvement process in the classroom should note the following:

- ✧ Seek to improve the system first: 80% of problems are due to system failure.
- ✧ By improving the system, everyone benefits.
- ✧ To improve student outcomes and student learning, the teacher needs to focus on the system rather than on individual students.
- ✧ It is the teacher's job to ensure that everyone in the class improves, not just a select few.

What statistical thinking tells us

HG Wells, many many years ago told us that 'statistical thinking will one day be as necessary for efficient citizenship as the ability to read and write'.

The application of statistical thinking means that, for any question for which we seek an answer, we should follow a process. We plan—what data we are going to collect: when, how, and where. We do—collect the data. We study—analyse the data. Finally, we act and improve—draw conclusions and take appropriate action.

This applies as much to the teacher as to anyone else. If a teacher wants to know why students are consistently late or absent, how the students are performing, what the students are learning, what the students feel they should learn, then the first thing a teacher needs to do is to gather data. This will tell the teacher the extent of the problem she or he wants to improve. The students can help the teacher gather the data, which might include:

- ✧ data to aid in the learning process: data on student performance should be presented and charted for the group, rather than for individuals, as this allows a focus on the system
- ✧ data to help motivate the student: involve the student in learning; use techniques such as nominal group technique, factor analysis, and affinity diagrams
- ✧ data to set goals and track progress
- ✧ data on student outcomes: jobs and further study.

What does quality learning mean in practice?

Tribus (1998) comments that, for too long, teachers have been concerned with what and how to teach; hence the chief emphasis is on curriculum and packages and not on how learning actually

occurs. This observation is pertinent to the VET sector at present, with its emphasis on competency standards, training packages and learning resources.

Learning seems to occur when students have a role in planning the learning, in investigating, interpreting, creating and doing. When students feel the need to know, the challenge for the teacher is to create an environment in which this occurs. Learning occurs when the student realises that, with choice comes a contract; that is, the learners have a say in what is learned, but equally, the learner has to make a commitment to achieving results.

Langford (1999) defines learning as the process by which a person gains:

- information (facts and figures)
- knowledge (understanding those facts and figures)
- know-how (applying the knowledge)
- wisdom (using judgement, discernment and experience to decide how, when, whether to apply the knowledge you have to a variety of situations).

The evidence that quality learning has taken place does not just lie in higher module completion rates, higher pass rates, levels of graduate satisfaction and rates of employment for a particular cohort of students. Evidence of quality learning is to found when:

- There is a rekindling of the passion for the job of teaching.
- Teachers translate into classroom practice their understanding of the philosophy of quality, of statistical variation, systems thinking and an understanding of brain research.
- Communication in the teaching unit, section and institute has improved and increased.
- Responsibility and accountability no longer lie solely with the teachers and have been transferred appropriately to the learner.
- Quality tools and processes are being used regularly in class to shift the responsibility and accountability to the learner.

Langford lists 20 points for quality learning. Those with particular relevance to teachers and learners in the VET sector are:

- Start teaching learners how to assess their own work and keep examples of their work in portfolios.
- The only reason to take a test is to find out what to do next.
- Take student names off tests and chart the results to see the system performance rather than be sidetracked by individual performances.
- Focus on improved documented learning, not improved rankings and ratings.
- Reduce dependency on testing and textbooks to achieve quality in learning; instead rely on improving the process of the learning experience.
- Create methods to encourage and track lifelong learning.

Langford (1998) defines quality learning as 'learning to consistently meet or exceed expectations and eventually delight those you work with on a daily basis (colleagues) and those outside the organisation (societies), so both entities can be successful'. He notes that principles for quality learning encapsulate the following:

- Quality is what colleagues and society tell us it is, not what we say it is, so we must:
  - Evaluate everything we do in terms of satisfying and exceeding expectations and then delighting through anticipating needs.
  - Ask colleagues and society what their expectations are, and never assume we know.

- In order to ensure the highest quality service possible, we must:
  - Focus our efforts on reducing the variation of service provided as well as improving its average performance level.
  - Continually improve how work is accomplished (the process) and make the new process the standard.
- Progress in quality learning is determined by measurement and thus we must:
  - Develop measurement systems to monitor our progress in relationship to colleagues and society's characteristics of quality.
  - Make decisions based on meaningful data.
  - Prioritise measurements to eliminate redundancy and focus efforts.
- We must identify and eliminate waste (in effort, learning time, materials and money) but not at the expense of society and colleague expectations.
- Apply the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle in all activities.

Improving learning improves the bottom line in a training organisation. It is important for the VET sector not to lose sight of this when implementing quality. Improving learning means more than increasing the module load completion rate or percentage of graduates in employment. It means getting students involved in learning, arousing their desire to learn and creating an environment in which learners feel intrinsically motivated to learn.

Langford (1998) resembles Flynn (1999), when he comments on the need to make a paradigm shift away from teaching and towards learning. We can consciously, and with consistent effort and commitment, create an environment in which the student's desire to learn is aroused. Of necessity, this means an environment in which the student is given responsibility for learning and is equally accountable with the teacher for learning taking place. This is not lip service to student-centred learning, but a philosophy which permeates all class activity and seeks to make learning a pleasure and a joy and thereby creates lifelong learners. This means getting students actively identifying:

- why they have chosen the particular course and what they want to achieve from it
- what questions or issues they want to cover in the course
- what their role is in the learning, including maintaining a portfolio of their work, keeping track of competencies gained and the level of learning being achieved
- how they will work as a team of people who are learning together with the aim of improving the overall performance of the team. The student, his or her fellow learners, and the teacher who supports the learning process, are a system. If improvements are made to the system, everyone will benefit.

Langford (1998) advocates using quality tools as one way to shift ownership and responsibility for learning from teachers to students. Tools relevant to this aim are the various methods of brainstorming, and methods for analysing the results of brainstorming. Plans can be developed which incorporate these ideas. Classroom tools, which can be used to develop a culture of students owning the learning, include force field analysis, affinity diagrams, nominal group technique, the 'five whys', and deployment flow charts.

While the focus of recent times in VET teaching has been the individual through self-paced learning and individual learning styles, we must not forget that the individual is part of a group, a system. While some individuals may benefit from individual attention and help, more benefit will be derived for the whole group if the teacher and students pay attention to what the system is achieving, and where the whole group is performing poorly.

The teacher's role in a quality learning environment

This notion of learning as the main activity in the class means a different role for the teacher, to facilitate learning, but what exactly does this mean? According to Tribus (1998), a leader:

> ... persuades people to do what they would not otherwise do. The leader takes them to places they would not go by themselves. A leader creates new systems within which people can achieve goals to which they and the leader aspire.

This sounds very much like the description of a teacher, as conceived above. Thus, teachers who facilitate learning ask themselves:

- Do I create an environment in which the learner's intrinsic desire to learn is aroused?
- Do I give the students a role in planning what is learnt?
- Do I create the need to know, rather than just telling students what they need to know?
- Am I the 'sage on the stage' or am I the mentor and coach ('the guide on the side')?
- Do I create an environment in which the students can fail in such a way that they learn from experience—wisdom comes from failure?
- Do I get the learners to commit themselves to achieving results?
- Do I give the students all the information I possess—curriculum, teaching materials, and data on the whole group?

Langford describes the characteristics of knowledgeable leaders and facilitators. Any improvement process should lead to the creation of leaders such as these. Given that teachers are leaders in the classroom/learning environment, their characteristics are therefore:

- They understand the need for systemic improvement.
- They work to exceed the expectations of society.
- They possess strong communication abilities.
- They construct, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate improvements and innovations.
- They understand that trust and teamwork play an important role in organisational improvement.
- They guide and train others to understand the overall importance of quality philosophies and theoretical approaches directed towards improving learning in all walks of life.
- They develop experiential projects and exercises designed to formulate an effective, systemic improvement process.
- They integrate quality as a natural part of the education process.
- They use the knowledge gained.

The challenge for teachers in the VET sector is to make this paradigm shift from teaching to learning. Making the shift depends on that other word starting with 'L'—leadership.

> You manage within a paradigm. You lead between paradigms.
>
> (Joel A Barker, quoted in Langford 1998)

Quality learning and lifelong learning are inextricable

Lifelong learning has been adopted as a goal of education by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and in the United Kingdom, via a white paper on lifelong learning. Lifelong learning has become an imperative because of the pace of change in society, the shift to the knowledge economy, and the way in which work is now organised and structured. For it to become a reality, a number of features of the education system must change, including the teaching–learning process.

The pace of change

The argument is that, in this age of rapid change, or rapid technological development and the shift to a knowledge-based economy, we cannot keep pace with the range of knowledge and skills needed for future work. Thus, what we must do is ensure that our citizens all acquire the ability to learn and the motivation to learn throughout life. The aim of learning could be described as being able to achieve personal fulfilment and to maintain employability. In days gone by, it was thought that in order to gain employment a person needed a certain set of skills and knowledge and it was the role of education, VET and the workplace to provide the learner with training and work experience to enable him or her to gain employment.

> We can no longer be confident that we, the elders, know what our children must know. We do not know the right answers to the questions of today. As for tomorrow, we do not even know the questions! What we can say with assurance is this: our descendants must become life long learners. Creating a yearning for learning should be the primary aim of education.
>
> (Tribus 1998, p.2)

In the context of a 'learning age', Kearns et al. (1999) identify the driving forces for change as the impact of globalisation, the impact of new information and communication technologies, the shift from an industrial and service economy to a knowledge-based economy, major changes in the workplace and in the organisation of work, and shifts in social attitudes and values towards work and leisure. Not all of these issues are widely understood. The authors make the following points about some of them:

> The implications of a knowledge-based economy has been a neglected area in VET development to date and requires more attention. A key implication is the requirement to move beyond skill and competence as factors in commercial success to consider the role of learning, imagination and creativity in generating and using knowledge for commercial success.
>
> (Kearns et al. 1999, p.16)

Given the dimensions of the change, the pace of change, the blurring of traditional boundaries and divisions (home/office, real/virtual), and the uncertainty and discontinuity, the attributes for success are different from those which drove the industrial and service economies. The necessary change in education and training is lifelong learning:

> If we are going to travel across a desert, we will take along a good supply of water. Of course, if there are plenty of watering stations along the way, we need only to know how to recognise these stations and how to obtain water from them ... Along life's journey, if the educational system is properly designed, [we will] encounter many opportunities for education. It is therefore much less necessary to equip us with a life long supply of knowledge. Instead, we should be equipped with the ability to learn and we should provide such joy in learning that students become learners for life.
>
> (Tribus 1998, p.18)

What needs to change in order for lifelong learning to become a reality?

For lifelong learning to become a reality, a number of changes need to be made to our current way of educating our citizens. These changes, identified by Kearns et al. (1999), need to be effected in the VET sector as well as in the school sector:

- Developing a lifelong learning culture has to be motivated by more than the economic rationale. Lifelong learning needs to become 'alluring' to the individual and a high satisfaction in itself.
- Changes to the teaching–learning process need to be made.
- The gap between general education and vocational education must be bridged. This again is a cultural phenomenon in societies, which attach a higher value to theoretical knowledge as against technical and vocational skills and competence. Redressing this imbalance should be a principal objective, in the first instance, of those concerned with policies for vocational education and training.
- The level of employer involvement in lifelong learning needs to be increased.

- There is a need to supplement public funding with increased contributions by individuals and employers if lifelong learning is to become a reality.

(Kearns et al. 1999, p.33)

The readiness of the VET sector for lifelong learning

VET policy, until the results of the ANTA marketing strategy were analysed and published, has had a strong training focus. Indeed, the 1998 ANTA conference revolved around the theme of a training culture, rather than around a learning culture. The need for lifelong learning was not recognised in the ANTA national strategy for VET in 1994 and recognised only incidentally in the 1998 national strategy.

By contrast, the national policy (Ministerial Council for Employment Education and Youth Affairs 1997) for the adult and community education (ACE) sector places lifelong learning at the centre of the ACE role. It describes the learning society thus:

> The challenge for the education and training system in the face of accelerated change is to expand the system's capacity to develop curious and enquiring learners, critical thinkers, creative innovators, participating citizens, intelligent and competent workers and managers, and skilful, literate communicators in person and public life—a learning society.

There is no major policy platform for lifelong learning within VET. However, the training organisations which have adopted the quality framework, and see the value of using it to shift the focus from teaching to learning in the classroom, are the ones embarking on the path to provide lifelong learning opportunities for their students.

Kearns et al. (1999) identify pedagogical implications for lifelong learning for VET institutions. They draw attention to the fact that the profile of the lifelong learner points to the need for VET institutions to:

> ... adopt active learning strategies that encourage students to develop self-reliance in learning, love of learning, curiosity and imagination and the mix of learning to learn skills required by the self-directed lifelong learner.

In order to give direction to a discussion of the implications for teaching–learning of adopting the philosophy of lifelong learning, Kearns et al. state the principles for a learning-based pedagogy for VET institutions and provide a profile of the lifelong learner.

Principles for a learning-based pedagogy in VET

- Learning experience must be meaningful and motivating for learners: they must be able to make sense of it and understand its purpose.
- Any learning experience must take account of what the learner brings to it.
- Learning experience should interweave content knowledge (the what) with procedural knowledge (the how) and strategic knowledge (the when). Or, it may be said that it should interweave knowledge, problem-solving strategies and real world applications.
- Learners must be actively involved in their own learning. They need coaching and error correction and, as they learn, the interventions by the teacher should diminish.
- Learning sequences should introduce increasing complexity.
- Learning experiences should help each person to build strategies for controlling his or her own performance, for setting goals, for planning, for checking work and for monitoring progress and revising their courses of learning. Most importantly, learners need to develop strategies for acquiring additional knowledge and expertise.

- Learning experiences should introduce the learner to the community of participants in a given occupation so that the individual will come to understand the physical, conceptual, symbolic and social tools of the community and their use.

(Kearns et al. 1999)

Profile of a lifelong learner

Adapting from *Developing lifelong learners through undergraduate education* (National Board of Employment Education and Training 1994), Kearns et al. (1999) profile the lifelong learner as a person with:

- an inquiring mind and curiosity (sense of curiosity, love of learning and discovery, reflective habits, resourceful)
- helicopter vision (sense of the interconnectedness of things, can apply 'systems' perspectives, strategic thinker, has a vision that goes beyond the job or field of study)
- a repertoire of learning skills (has learning-to-learn skills, can learn from others in team, understands different kinds of learning)
- a commitment to personal mastery and ongoing development (has motivation and desire for learning, commitment to ongoing personal and career development, self-esteem, can deal with change)
- interpersonal effectiveness (able to work with others in a team and learn from them, can give and receive feedback, has cultural understanding)
- information literacy (can locate, evaluate, manage and use information and information technologies).

To date, the VET system has concentrated on producing students with employment-related skills. It has been recognised, through the inclusion of key competencies, that employment skills are not a narrow range of technical skills but encompass broader interpersonal, team, communication, problem-solving and technology skills.

Yet, to date, the system has striven to produce competent workers rather than competent workers who are lifelong learners and who have attributes such as motivation, vision, love of learning, and have the capacity to embrace change. These types of attributes will develop more widely if fostered by the way in which we educate our students. If we pre-package the learning, if it is pre-digested and presented by the trainer or teacher, if the involvement of the student is kept to the minimum, we will not create the sort of learner described in the profile of the lifelong learner. Yet this profile describes exactly the type of graduate that employers have been telling the VET sector for years that they want.

Kearns et al. state that a capability for lifelong learning involves a mix of core foundations (literacy, learning-to-learn skills and understanding others), generic competencies (problem-solving, team skills and using technology) and values and attitudes (curiosity, self-esteem and desire for learning). Tribus (1997, 1998) suggests that any educational system should be judged by whether it supports the development of the following in each learner:

- knowledge which allows the learner to understand
- know-how (or know how to do) which enables the learner to put knowledge to work
- wisdom, enabling the learner to decide where, when and how to apply the know-how
- character, which makes each of us decent human beings fit to live nearby

Practitioners like Tribus and Langford believe that this can be achieved by the adoption of a quality framework in the class and by the use of quality tools. This approach, essentially, is a systematic way of putting the adult learning principles as described by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) into practice.

There are other ways of achieving the same goal. One example proposed by a number of teachers during this study is the 4MAT system (McCarthy 1990). Another includes implementing the insights gained through the theories of learning styles, multiple intelligences, whole brain learning, and experiential learning. The important thing is to have a focus on learning as a vision and let teachers achieve it in ways they feel able. Quality in its transformative sense, as defined by Langford and Tribus, is one path.

8 How the quality framework can help in the classroom

Within VET, the management of institutes has been improved by using the self-assessment framework for quality in VET and by implementing ISO 9000. Strategic planning, customer service, organisational performance and quality of processes have all improved. The VET sector has also put a focus on leadership (see Callan 2002) and the people in the organisation.

But, in this sector, it would appear that most teachers and policy-makers still operate in the same paradigm. Predominantly, they believe that the role of the sector is to deliver training rather than to encourage, arouse and nurture learning.

The definition of quality used in the VET sector literature does not mention the word 'learning'. A comparison (table 7) of the VET principles of quality with the principles adopted by the Victorian Quality in Schools project reveals a difference in approach. The latter principles focus on the learning, the importance of people and a systems approach. On the other hand, the VET sector principles, which describe core business as 'development and delivery of VET products and services', are more sterile in their expression.

Table 7: Quality in Schools principles for quality, vs VET principles for quality

Quality in Schools project, nine principles of contemporary quality	Principles for quality in VET
Quality is defined by the client.	Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of a primary focus on clients and potential clients of the vocational education and training sector.
To improve the outcomes, improve the process.	Quality arrangements should promote a focus on core business—development and delivery of vocational education and training products and services to individual learners and enterprises.
People work in a system. The role of the leader is to work on the system, to improve it continuously with the help of the people.	
All systems, processes exhibit variability.	
Continual improvement relies on continual learning.	Quality arrangements should promote continuous improvement of the quality of vocational education and training products, services and associated process.
The most important resource is people—their creativity and knowledge.	Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of ongoing staff participation and ownership.
Decisions and actions must be based on facts and data.	Quality arrangements should encourage informed decision-making based on the measurement, analysis and appropriate use of data.
Leadership provides direction and creates a supportive environment.	Quality arrangements should emphasise the importance of leadership in the successful development and implementation of a quality approach.
Improvement must be plan-driven, not event-driven.	
	Quality arrangements should be comprehensive and balanced, encompassing key quality management elements such as quality assurance, quality improvements and best practice.
	Quality arrangements should add value to vocational education and training products and services.

Sources: ANTA 1997c; Education Victoria 1998

Expanding the quality 'psyche' of VET

The writings and workshops of educators such as Tribus and Langford give an insight into the body of knowledge and theory underpinning the quality philosophy. They draw particularly on the wisdom of Deming (1994), not yet part of the VET quality 'psyche':

- The key to implementing quality is leadership—in the VET system, in the training organisation, in the teams, sections, and teaching units, and in the classroom itself. Langford (undated, p.6) observes that the ingredient most in short supply once basic funding needs are met is leadership.
- Having a quality approach means taking a systems view of issues. In the class, this means seeking to improve the performance of the whole class, rather than seeking to improve individuals who are performing below the 'average' level.
- Data are necessary to improve the system; that is, the class. Teachers and students can gather data on the system, and analyse the data using tools such as correlation charts, frequency charts and Pareto charts, and by using simple statistical techniques such as calculations of standard deviation.
- All systems exhibit variation and thus variation is normal. Therefore, for the teacher it is important to chart the progress each week of the whole group and to note the variation that is within the normal range. It is the teacher's job to improve the system—the whole class—so that performance for all students falls within boundaries acceptable to teachers and students. Any performance outside this can then be studied to identify whether it is a special cause, and, if so, what action needs to be taken. Deming warned practitioners of the dangers of treating common causes of variation as if they were special and treating special causes as if they were common. The only way to avoid this danger is to gather and chart data on the whole group and analyse them regularly.
- Quality tools and processes ensure that the learner owns the process of learning; they allow the learning to be responsible and 'just in time', ensure the learning is relevant to the learner, and allow the learner to be active and to 'do' rather than to 'receive'.

At the classroom level, where the class is the organisation, roles change. The teacher is the leader, students are the people in the organisation and the customers are the beneficiaries of the students' work. This can include employers, other teams of learners and the community, if work has been undertaken for the community, either in real life or in a hypothetical setting.

Applying quality (excellence) in the classroom

Some teachers may choose to achieve the paradigm shift by putting into practice adult learning principles (Knowles, Holton & Swanson 1998) or other approaches such as the 4MAT system (McCarthy 1990). The quality framework and tools are one way, perhaps a more disciplined and comprehensive way, of ensuring that improved learning is the bottom line. Table 8 is a brief description of how the Australian Quality Council excellence framework can be applied in the classroom.

Table 8: Applying the Australian Quality Council excellence framework in the classroom

AQC excellence framework	Application to the classroom–learning environment
Leadership	The teacher is the leader. The role of the leader is to improve the system (the class) with the help of the students. The leader creates an environment in which students' motivation to learn is aroused. The leader communicates with and gets involvement from employers and members of the wider community.
Strategy, policy and planning	Designing the learning experiences, deciding on a class code of conduct is done by the teacher and students working together within the boundaries of the competency standards or training package. Lesson plans should not be designed solely by the teacher, but with the students.
Information and analysis	Data relating to performance, gaps in knowledge, barriers to learning, for example, are collected by the students themselves and the teacher throughout the learning process, and analysed using basic statistical techniques so as to inform and guide the learning.
People	The people in the system are the teacher and the students. Students own the learning. The teacher's role is to guide, oversee, coach, coax the students and lead them to becoming independent learners. The students work with teachers in planning the learning, doing it and monitoring it through, for example, self-assessment against a competency matrix and portfolios of work.
Client focus	Learning happens when there is a clear beneficiary of the activity that students undertake. Thus, the beneficiaries of learning experiences could be employers, a community group, the students themselves or their families, depending on how practical and real the learning experiences are. There is more motivation to undertake a project or piece of work once a beneficiary has been identified.
Process and service	Learning is the process. Quality tools can be used throughout learning to involve students in designing their learning experiences as well as monitoring and assessing the activities they carry out which are part of learning.
Organisational performance	The success of the whole class is monitored and it is the teacher's job to work on the system so that improvements benefit everyone. Measures of success can include scores on individual assignments. These can be reported anonymously for the whole class and the performance of the whole class can be monitored and everyone can play a role in working out what aspects of the system need to be improved. Areas of poor performance are identified and the teachers and students work on the system to improve this, rather than having a focus on individuals who did not perform.

Source: Australian Quality Council (2002) for left column, preceding discussion for right

9 Conclusions

> The challenge for those in education is to reclaim and reshape the (quality) agenda to adapt it to the goals we can believe in and support as educators. (Jackson 1995, p.56)

Research undertaken during this project has highlighted a number of fundamental aspects to the debate relating to the implementation of quality systems in the VET sector in Australia. Most important of all is the fact that attempts at implementation of quality processes sector-wide and from there to the classroom have been thwarted and complicated by the parallel application of a significant number of profound structural changes to the way VET in Australia—and indeed worldwide—is conceived and delivered.

We speak of course of competency-based training and similar initiatives resulting largely from the changed economic circumstances arising in the early 1990s. These profound shifts from a learning and teaching culture to one now defined by terms such as 'training' and 'delivery' and 'clients' are largely the product of rationalist economic forces induced by the new global approach to economic systems.

The notion of quality itself—what people understand this term to mean—is the other aspect related to quality implementation in VET uncovered during this research, which certainly militates against precise assessment of the degree to which quality systems have been or are being implemented throughout the sector. We have discovered that 'quality' means many things to many people, its interpretation and understanding being blurred by its generic nature and its capacity to be applied to all areas of human endeavour and activity.

Observations about the way quality is being currently implemented in the VET sector, and the insights and learning which are a result of recent work by quality practitioners in education such as Langford and Tribus, indicate that:

- The way quality is defined and commonly understood throughout the VET sector, and the way it is described in the VET quality principles at present, bear little relation to the sector's core business—that is, learning. They do not mention learning, nor do they mention a systems approach, the need to improve the process of learning in order to improve the outcome, the importance of planning, or the need to note that variation is inherent in all systems.
- Too often, quality is interpreted and acted upon as if it is customer focus or strategic planning or data collection. These are the parts of the quality approach, not the whole.
- The structure for this shift from teaching to learning is with us: we can take the quality framework and use it in the classroom if we change our thinking about what a class is, and what the roles of students and teachers are. At the institute level, the institute becomes the organisation, the leaders are institute management, the people are the staff of the institute and the customers are students and employers. In the classrooms, the roles change in that the class becomes the organisation, the leader is the teacher, the people are the students and the product is learning.
- The bottom line for a VET organisation should be improving learning: this is the 'profit' of a quality training organisation that is managed and run effectively and efficiently.

At present, we could measure the impact quality is having on management of institutions, because this is where most of the quality activity has been directed. Heywood (1998) summarised this when he said:

> ... what in fact is offered by a quality approach is a coherent framework for thinking about the management and improvement of organisations—a systems view of the organisation.

What we need now is to adopt a systems' view of the class and then we will start seeing quality learning. Only then will we be ready to assess the impact in the classroom of the body of knowledge and wisdom which is called 'quality'.

Looking again at the quality framework in detail, it is possible to identify at national, state and institute level (and in the classroom/learning environment) who plays the role of leader, customers and people, and what exactly the organisation is at each of these levels. This exercise (table 9) is valuable because it reveals that, at each level, the key stakeholders have different functions, and it reminds us that, in the VET sector, quality principles are expressed and put into practice in different ways, depending on the organisation and depending on whether we are talking about the national, state, institute or classroom level.

What binds all these levels is the commitment to a common philosophy and set of principles. So far, that philosophy is basically one of continuous improvement and the principles reflect a customer focus. The language of the quality movement has to date reflected the language of the business world. The ideas are worthy, but the way they are expressed has not engaged many teachers and trainers, particularly since many of the fundamental components and concepts of a learning culture appear to have been excluded. Quality encompasses all aspects of human activity—not just the world of commerce and marketing. Thus the language of quality must encompass all aspects of the 'system's' activity—in this case learning.

The system is the VET sector. The key players are students, teachers and other staff in institutes, employers and community organisations, people who run the institutes, people who work in the state and territory departments of education and training and people who work in the Australian National Training Authority. Depending on the level, the role that each of the people play is different.

In the final analysis, it will be the implementation of quality systems in the classroom—the grassroots application of quality—which will determine the nature of the 'product' emerging from the VET system—a lifelong learner.

Table 9: Key players at national, state and institute levels of the VET system

VET system	Organisation	Leaders	People	Customers
National level	ANTA	ANTA CEO & ANTA Board	Staff at ANTA	State, territory departments of training, CEOs and department heads, research organisations
State level	State, territory departments of training	CEO and department heads	Department staff	Institute, registered training organisation directors
			Consultants	Industry groups like industry training advisory bodies
Institute level	College	Director of college, registered training organisation	Teachers, trainers, support & admin. staff	Students, employers, graduates
Classroom level	Class, learning unit or team	Teacher	Students	Employers or other groups for whom students work or undertake projects

Source: Application of previous discussion

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Appendices

Appendix A

TAFE institutes in this study, their awards

TAFE institutes	Award
Regency Institute of TAFE (SA)	1997 Training provider of the year (ANTA)
South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE (NSW)	1996 Training provider of the year (ANTA)
Southbank Institute of TAFE (Qld)	1997 Commendation for high achievement in business excellence (AQC)
	1997 Training provider of the year runner-up
Sydney Institute of Technology (NSW)	1997 Achievement in business excellence (AQC)
Kangan Institute of TAFE (Vic)	1997 Achievement in business excellence (AQC)
Casey Institute of TAFE (Vic)	1997 Commitment to business excellence (AQC)
Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (Qld)	1996 Training provider of the year runner-up
SE Metropolitan College of TAFE (WA)	1996 Training provider of the year runner-up

Appendix B

Project advisory group

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(see appendix C for questions)

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Appendix C

1 Preliminary questions for teachers in focus groups

National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd
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Phone (08) 8333 8400 Facsimile (08) 8331 9211

Preliminary questionnaire for focus group participants

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is conducting a national research project to examine the impact that quality initiatives are having on the teaching/learning experience in the VET sector.

As part of this research one of our research officers, Jennifer Gibb, will be conducting a focus group discussion with a sample of teachers from your training organisation to find out your views on how implementing quality has had an effect on the work you do as a teacher.

As you have kindly agreed to be part of the focus group discussion, Jennifer would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided within a day to: *Insert name of quality manager, institute address, etc.*

The information you provide will help to plan the focus group discussion.

Questions related to the learning environment

1. Please list the main courses in which you teach:

   _____

2. Please list the subjects which you mainly teach:

   _____

For the following questions, please tick the box which most closely describes the learning environment in which you teach:

3. Please indicate the size of the classes that you teach:
   - ☐ generally small groups (1–10 students)
   - ☐ generally larger groups (11–20 students)
   - ☐ over 20 students (*please indicate how large*.....)

4. Please indicate the main delivery strategies you use:
   - ☐ classroom-based, teacher directed learning
   - ☐ classroom-based, self-paced learning
   - ☐ distance
   - ☐ workplace-based

5. Please describe your learners:
   - ☐ all ages
   - ☐ mainly 15–19 years
   - ☐ mainly 20–25 years
   - ☐ mainly mature-aged

6. Please indicate in the space below any distinctive features of the groups of students which you teach—for example, are they mainly employed, are they mainly indigenous, are they mainly non-English speaker, etc.? *(in the original, a box follows)*

Questions relating to quality

1. What quality initiatives that you are aware of has your organisation put into place in the last 3 years? *(box follows)*

2. What resources and support has your organisation provided you with in order for you to be able to implement these quality initiatives? *(box follows)*

3. Do you believe that these quality initiatives have changed the work that you do as a teacher?
   - ☐ yes
   - ☐ no

4. If the focus on quality has changed your work as a teacher, please give two or three examples of ways in which the work that you do has changed. *(box follows)*

5. Please give one or more examples of improvements that you have recently made (either in learning resources, the learning environment, the assessment practices) and explain what was the trigger that led to these improvements being made. *(box follows)*

6. If you would like to make any comment about how the focus on quality is affecting your work as a teacher, please do so in the space below. *(box follows)*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
If you would like to discuss the project before the focus group meeting which has been scheduled at your organisation, please contact Jennifer Gibb on:
tel: 08-8333-8450
email: jenniferg@ncver.edu.au

2 Prompts for teacher definition of quality

NCVER

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Definition of quality

What is your understanding of the term 'quality'

Please circle the definition that you believe best fits your understanding of quality:

1. **Is it a set of processes and procedures?**

   Quality is excellence in the management of our services, our processes and our products. Quality management focusses an organisation on the needs of its customers, with a view to ensuring ongoing competitiveness and effective use of resources.

2. **Is it a philosophy and commitment to continuous improvement that is built into the culture of your training organisation?**

   A quality system is a comprehensive, organisation wide approach to continuous improvement and ensuring consistent quality standards. It involves looking at all aspects of your service and asking 'how can we do things better?' But, you don't just ask the question once. In a quality system, everyone in the organisation continually looks for ways to improve products, services, timelines, processes—and ultimately, outcomes and client satisfaction.

3. **Neither of the above: here is my own understanding of quality:**
   (in the original a box follows)

3 Questions for teacher focus groups

NCVER

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252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068
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Plan for discussion with teachers

1. **Introduction and thanks**
   - ✧ me
   - ✧ you - please fill in name, work address, phone, email

2. **This project:**
   - ✧ aim and outcome
   - ✧ participat g organisations
   - ✧ your organisation—and its quality award

3. **What we will do**

   Setting the scene
   - ✧ Ascertain what you understand by the term 'quality'
   - ✧ Has implementing quality across your institute had a negative or positive impact?
   - ✧ Which quality initiatives help you delivery a better teaching/learning experience?
   - ✧ Which quality initiatives hinder you?

   What impact is implementing quality having on quality of delivery?

   In small groups discuss the following questions then report back to whole group—general discussion

Gathering feedback and carrying out improvements

1. What data do you collect on student learning as a result of the quality initiatives that your training organisation has implemented?
2. How does this data affect the learning experience that you design and offer to students?
3. In what ways do the quality initiatives that have been implemented help you to identify problems, generate solutions and satisfy your students and the employers?

Monitoring your performance

1. How do you check on your own performance as a teacher?
   - ✧ What methods do you use to evaluate your performance as a teacher?
   - ✧ What performance measures/indicators do you use to monitor your own performance?
   - ✧ Are these visible?
   - ✧ How are successful staff/students given recognition for their work?

2. In what ways do the quality initiatives that have been implemented encourage or enable you to do this?

Maintaining and developing your competence

1. In what ways do the quality initiatives implemented in your organisation encourage you and other staff to improve continually your skills and knowledge and develop skills that are relevant to industry?

2. What training/professional development have you undertaken in the last 12 months?

3. Have you had the opportunity to return to industry/gain industry experience over the last 12 months?

Appendix D

Quality initiatives identified by teachers consulted

Quality management initiatives	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
QA processes and forms	•		•	•				
Consistent recording /monitoring of procedures/documentation	•				•		•	
Self-support development teams	•							
QA personnel in faculties	•			•				
Internal auditors/training for auditing	•			•	•	•	•	•
Surveys of staff and students	•							
QA manuals/policies			•	•				•
Quality improvement teams			•	•	•			
ISO 9001 certification				•	•		•	•
Quality awards					•	•		
Educational improvement teams					•			
Strategic planning			•		•			•
Middle management quality teams					•			
Self-assessment					•	•		
Customer response forms					•			
Measures of performance					•			
Vision and mission statements					•			
Quality Endorsed status (QETO)								•

National VET initiatives	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Competency-based training				•				
Flexible delivery			•	•				
Amalgamation of TAFE colleges				•				
Invalid module enrolment audits				•				
Registration of courses/ARF				•			•	•
Introduction of modules			•			•		
Introduction of self-paced learning						•	•	
Ongoing assessment						•		
Introduction of traineeships			•					
Workplace delivery			•					
User choice							•	
Upgrading learning resources and modules (in keeping with industry requirements)							•	

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Customer focus	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Student evaluation/surveys (needs, expectations, satisfaction)		•	•	•	•	•	•	
Course inductions/student preparation/orientation			•	•				
Appeals processes				•				
Student refunds				•				
Enrolment procedures				•				
Customer service/student service policies & initiatives		•	•		•			
Staff to liaise with international students		•						
Student selection procedures							•	
Student suggestion cards/customer service cards								•

Initiatives relating to staff	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Staff code of conduct/vision statement for team				•			•	
Category 2 workplace trainer/assessor training				•				•
Training and staff development generally			•		•			•
Staff surveys						•		
Team-based activities		•						
Part-time teacher inductions/orientations			•					
Experimenting with facilitating learning instead of directing learning			•					
Development of performance indicators for sections			•					
Support for flexible delivery			•					
Self-managing work groups							•	

Administration/management of information	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Development of new computer admin. program				•				
Procedures manuals/documentation					•		•	
Improvements in short course admin.					•			
Organisational procedures to assist delivery of programs/enrolments/re-enrolments					•	•		
Procedures for recording management of staff/students/classes/RPL		•				•	•	
Procedures for advertising/informing students of class availability/course information			•			•		
Procedures for student discipline, absentee follow-up, business admin.		•				•		
Roll book auditing		•					•	
Better monitoring of budgets		•						
Better recognition process			•					
More streamlined admin. systems to correlate grading and enrolments							•	

Physical environment	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Moving to a new campus	•							
Better offices and equipment	•						•	
Better lecture theatres	•							
Improved computer networking		•						
Stricter adherence to OHS and welfare							•	

Initiatives related to teaching/learning and assessment	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Designing courses for large companies	•							
Training partnerships with local industry	•							
Using computer-assisted learning methods and resources		•						
Workplace delivery		•						
Night classes for RPL students			•					
Improved student assessment procedures (instruments, assessment criteria)	•	•						

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Appendix E

1 Examples of quality initiatives improving teachers' work

Administrative improvements	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Better induction and orientation	•		•					
Exam results processed faster	•							
Better RPL and credit transfer	•							
Better guidelines and operational procedures	•						•	
Better records (student progress) and filing				•	•	•	•	
More accountability/better class management						•		
More concise instructions for students		•				•		
More focus on outcomes by teachers & students		•				•		
Gather more data and have more info. to evaluate performance of teaching section			•					
Improved reporting processes give students better course feedback							•	
Teachers get more assistance from other units—like finance, HR							•	

Focus on the learner	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Lessons not so teacher-directed				•				
More evaluations and analysis of these					•			
More contact with students and therefore teachers understand needs better		•	•				•	

Better assessment practices	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
More standardisation and uniformity	•				•			•
Better management of assessment documentation					•			•
More assessment info. available for students			•					
Use assessment to reflect student learning—not a power trip for educator							•	
Using plain English in assessment materials							•	
More emphasis on correct procedure for assessment after assessor training								•

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Better approach to work	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Focussing on quality enables teacher to deliver quality service				•				
Knowledge of quality system encourages teachers to look at different ways to improve delivery						•		
Quality is a way of thinking about work and gives people internal motivation to apply this way of thinking to the classroom						•		
Quality gives increased responsibility to the teacher and therefore more satisfaction		•						
Quality encourages teachers to be more innovative and flexible		•						
Quality leads to continual upgrade of skills and research		•						
Quality encourages constant evaluation and improvement		•						
Quality leads teachers to use technology more		•						
Quality has led to better co-ordination across TAFE courses							•	
Quality has resulted in huge lift in self-esteem								•
Quality has led to better co-operation between staff members								•
Quality has led to the welding of a team ethos within the department								•

More focus on the customer	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
More consistent gathering of feedback	•		•	•		•		•
More interaction with industry						•		•

Delivery is better	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Introduction of the practice firm					•			
More discussion in class and group sharing of experiences and knowledge	•	•	•			•		
More case study work		•						
More industry experience		•						

Better learning resources	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Preparing study guides/learning resources	•		•		•		•	
Use of videos/teaching aids/materials	•				•			
Better links with resource centre	•							

Better facilities and equipment	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Better lecture theatre and offices	•							
Better computers						•		

More staff development	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Workplace assessor training for all								•
More computer training								•
Quality procedures and induction package given to new staff and casual staff								•

2 Examples of quality initiatives impeding teachers' work

Extra paperwork and therefore less time with students	Institutes							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Additional form filling, keeping records, more bureaucracy	•			•	•			
Less time to generate teaching resources/teaching/preparation				•	•	•		

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

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